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HISTORIC STRUCTURES REPORT

HISTORICAL DATA SECTION

PIONEERS, POLITICS, PROGRESS AND PLANNING:  
THE STORY OF SAN FRANCISCO'S AQUATIC PARK

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## SECTION I: ADMINISTRATIVE DATA

Aquatic Park is a unit of the East District of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area. It is located on the waterfront of San Francisco, California, near the famous tourist attractions of Fisherman's Wharf and is bordered by Van Ness Avenue, Hyde Street, Beach Street, and the San Francisco Bay.

### A. General Management Plan Proposals:

The General Management Plan of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area proposes the adaptive use of Aquatic Park. This involves the eventual removal of two operations that currently utilize the Aquatic Park bathhouse; the National Maritime Museum and the San Francisco Senior Center. The museum is slated to be moved to Fort Mason. The interior of the bathhouse would then be utilized as a community center with headquarters facilities for Sea Scouts and expanded bathhouse facilities. Aquatic Park would be maintained, developed, and managed as an urban park setting with special attention given to preserving the historic character.

The General Management Plan also proposes the adaptive use and development of Municipal Pier and Aquatic Park lagoon as a mooring and display facility for the Golden Gate National Recreation Area's fleet of historic ships which are currently moored at Hyde Street Pier; an existing Sea Scout building would be removed and the Sea Scout operation relocated in the bathhouse. Food concession service would be upgraded; and the use of the park would reflect more aquatic purposes, with the encouragement of rowing and swimming. The proposed developments would reinstitute the historic uses of Aquatic Park and the bathhouse structure. Some restoration of the interior of the bathhouse would be done to remove or mitigate intrusive changes or damage done during museum use of the structure. The historic scene and setting of the park would be carefully considered at all times:

As improvements are made, close and careful consideration will be given to the resources for which the parks were established, to insure preservation of all cultural, scenic, and recreational values.

### B. List of Classified Structures/National Register of Historic Places:

The following Aquatic Park structures and buildings have been placed on the List of Classified Structures: Bathhouse (AP-1); West restroom (AP-2); Municipal Pier (AP-4); East Restroom (AP-11); Ampitheatre (AP-16); Seawall (AP-18); West Speaker Tower (AP-19); and the East Speaker Tower (AP-20). Three rowing club structures in Aquatic Park, which are not Federally owned, are also on the List of Classified Structures; they are the South End Rowing Club (AP-10.1), the Ariel Rowing Club (AP-10.2) (which has since been demolished) and the Dolphin Rowing Club (AP-10.3).

Aquatic Park has been nominated to the National Register of Historic Places as the "Aquatic Park Historic District." This nomination was completed by the staff of the Division of Cultural Resource Management, National Park Service, Western Region in June of 1979. The nomination was reviewed and sent to the

Regional Office in March of 1980. The nomination is pending approval by the State Historic Preservation Officer and the National Register of Historic Places. Until the final decision on the National Register status of Aquatic Park, all structures and buildings are protected by Federal Historic Preservation laws and any plans or actions planned for the park will be in accordance with the guidelines of the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation.

Other properties in or adjacent to Aquatic Park that will be mentioned in the body of this report have also been nominated to or placed on the National Register of Historic Places. The Fort Mason Historic District, which includes Pier 4, was placed on the National Register on April 23, 1979. The Haslett Warehouse was placed on the National Register on March 28, 1975, prior to Federal ownership. The cable car turn-around in Victorian Park, part of the San Francisco Cable Car System, is a unit of that National Historic Landmark system and is on the National Register of Historic Places. The Fire Department Pumping Station Number 2 at the foot of Van Ness was nominated to the National Register in 1975 and was placed on the Register on May 12, 1976. The Ghiradelli Square complex, with structures from the Pioneer Woolen Mills and the D. Ghiradelli Chocolate Company, was placed on the National Register on April 29, 1982. All of the historic ships moored in Aquatic Park lagoon are on the National Register of Historic Places.<sup>1</sup> Two structures which were moved to the Hyde Street Pier by the State of California for the former Maritime State Historic Park have also been placed on the National Register: the Tubbs Cordage Company Office Building and the Lewis Ark, which were respectively placed on the National Register on November 6, 1979 and November 8, 1979.

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<sup>1</sup>

The C.A. Thayer, which is also a National Historic Landmark; the Wapama, the Alma, the Eureka and the Hercules.

## SECTION II: ARCHAEOLOGICAL DATA

### A. Pre-historic Archaeological Resources

One aboriginal habitation site is known to have existed in the Aquatic Park area. This site, which is registered as archaeological site SFr-23, was located "on top of a 40-foot sandy cliff...at the intersection of Hyde and Beach streets."<sup>1</sup> SFr-23 may have been similar to now preserved Native American habitation sites on the bluff of Black Point, SFr-29, SFr-30, and SFr-31. Unfortunately, SFr-23 was not subjected to archaeological analysis before urbanization impact. The only record is that of Alexander S. Taylor, who described the area in 1861:

Walking, some time since, in the vicinity of Black Point, we passed over towards the high point of land which forms, we believe, the intersection of Hyde and Beach Streets. It is a dreary and sand-driven place, with scarcely a habitation near, and overlooking, with a precipice of forty or fifty feet, the waters of the Bay, which surge and moan at the rocky base. This locality is said to have been the site of an old Indian rancheria, and the circular fire-burnt spot on the bare place at the summit, with quantities of decayed fish bones and crushed shells mixed with sand, seem to warrant the tradition.<sup>2</sup>

Subsequent development of this area would seem to have impacted the site. A street has been graded, and the four corners developed; the northeast corner is occupied by the Haslett Warehouse, a GGNRA owned early 20th century brick warehouse which has deep foundations excavated into the slope of the hillside; the southeast corner is occupied by a modern commercial building which houses a restaurant and offices. The southwest corner is occupied by the Buena Vista Cafe, a bar and restaurant. The northwest corner is part of the Victorian Park, which is in Aquatic Park and is administered by the National Park Service. A cable car turn-around, constructed in 1964, is surrounded by modern Victorian-theme benches, paths, and an open gazebo structure that provides visitor protection from the elements. It is the northwest corner that holds the most likely promise for prehistoric archaeological resources.

### B. Historical Archaeological Resources:

Prior to 1900, the Aquatic Park area was part of Black Point Cove, a natural lagoon directly adjacent to Black Point, which was also known as Punta Medanos or Point San Jose and is now the Fort Mason Military Reservation. Black Point Cove was filled in 1906 with rubble and debris from the devastated downtown

<sup>1</sup> Roger E. Kelly, Archeological Resources of Golden Gate National Recreation Area. (San Francisco: National Park Service, 1976) page 46.

<sup>2</sup> Alexander S. Taylor, "San Francisco Bay Indians," The California Farmer: Journal of Useful Sciences, May 31, 1861, page 106.

area during the reconstruction of the city after the disastrous earthquake and fire in April of that year. The former white sand beach, which had met the water at what is now Beach Street, was covered with "some 15,000 truck loads of red brick rubble" from the Palace Hotel on Market Street.<sup>1</sup> This rubble also included burnt items of daily use, such as utensils, bottles, coins, and non-organic building materials.

Following the dumping of the earthquake rubble on the beach, portions of the cove were subsequently filled in 1907 and 1908. Plans for the extension of the Belt Line Railroad through the area caused the continued filling of the cove in 1913, when "considerable material" was dumped "along the line of ordinary high tide on the west shore of the cove."<sup>2</sup> This fill may have come from the Belt Line Railroad tunnel that was then being excavated through Black Point. Fill from this tunnel was also dumped into the cove near Hyde and Jefferson Streets. Fortunately this filling operation was stopped before the cove had completely vanished. Later dredging operations cleared the cove to its present configurations which approximates about two-thirds of the original size. An army pier and the railroad trestle across the cove were removed after 1925 to further clear the area.

There is a potential for historical archaeological remains of both the pier and railroad trestle pilings in the lagoon, as well as the now buried earthquake debris. This debris was encountered in the fill at the foot of Van Ness Avenue during construction activity in 1976, at the western end of the old cove, and occasional beach erosion has exposed red brick and burnt material in front of the bathhouse. As mentioned before, this rubble and debris may contain burnt items of daily use, such as utensils, tools, bottles, coins, and non-organic building materials.<sup>3</sup>

In addition to the earthquake debris, which may have been intermingled or buried by the clean fill of the Black Point tunnel, there is also a potential for scattered artifactual materials relating to the maritime use of the cove. The cove was in use as a 19th century anchorage for some vessels of a light draft, but was not considered a major anchorage. It seems likely that these craft, vessels loading or unloading at the Pioneer Woolen Mills, Selby Smelting Works, or small fishing craft, could have lost anchors, tools, utensils, and shipboard garbage overboard. There is no record of any buried or sunken hulks in the Aquatic Park lagoon; the nearest such resource may be the ship Tonquin, which wrecked near North Point during the gold rush.

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<sup>1</sup> Anna Coxe Toogood, Historic Resource Study: The Bay Area Community, A Civil History of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area. (Denver: National Park Service, 1980) Vol. II, page 122.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, page 124.

<sup>3</sup> Roger E. Kelly, "Historic Objects From Fort Mason 'Mini Park,' Van Ness Avenue at Aquatic Park:" Golden Gate National Recreation Area, San Francisco." San Francisco, National Park Service, 1980, pages 2-4.

Analysis of historic charts and maps of the area, however, indicates that the ship's remains were located near the intersection of Leavenworth and Jefferson Streets, which is part of the Fisherman's Wharf.<sup>4</sup> Frequent dredging of this area may have destroyed any traces of the Tonquin.<sup>4</sup>

It must be stressed that the potential for the discovery of maritime archaeological resources in the Aquatic Park area is slight if not unlikely. However, modern ship related refuse may be encountered; divers have recovered three modern anchors from the bottom of the cove that are associated with the Sea Scout base at Aquatic Park.<sup>5</sup>

Another historical archaeological resource that may be encountered at Aquatic Park are the remains of the pilings of the various rowing clubs. After 1937, the three clubs were located on the beach in front of the bathhouse site. These clubs were removed to their present location at the corner of Hyde and Jefferson Streets around 1939; occasional beach erosion has uncovered what may be the stumps of the pilings of these structures.

In addition to the pilings of the various Aquatic Park rowing clubs, the possibility exists of buried foundations, pipes, and demolition debris from the San Francisco Water Company pumping station at the site of the present day Bocce Ball court. Archaeological testing of this area is needed to verify the existence of any such remains. There may also be remnants of mounts for the wooden flume that carried water to the station by way of Black Point on the undeveloped portions of hillside at the tip of the point. Such remains have been found along the historic alignment of the flume near Fort Point and Baker Beach.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Personal Communication, John A. Martini, July 9, 1980.

<sup>5</sup> Telephone Conversation, John A. Martini, July 9, 1980.

<sup>6</sup> Kelly, Archeological Resources, pages 60-61.

### SECTION III: HISTORICAL DATA

#### 1. BLACK POINT COVE AND THE MILITARY, 1797-1852

Black Point Cove, now known as Aquatic Park lagoon, derives its name from Black Point, which juts out into San Francisco Bay between North Beach and the Marina District. Black Point was originally known as Punta Medanos (sand dune point) by the Spanish settlers of the area. The Spanish fortified the point in 1797 by building a wood and adobe parapet to mount cannon. According to one historian, the fortification, known as the Bateria San Jose, "had eight embrasures, but only five eight-pounders were mounted....No troops were stationed at the point; daily, a sentinel from the Presidio visited and inspected the work..."<sup>1</sup> The bateria was apparently completed and armed by the summer of 1797, according to the Spanish archives.<sup>2</sup>

Unfortunately, the Bateria San Jose was allowed to deteriorate slowly. The sometimes inclement weather did damage to the fortification on at least one occasion, when winter storms in November of 1804 leveled a palizada at the site. The palizada, a brush and timber structure, had probably been built near the fortification to house powder and other materials necessary for the operation of the five guns. It seems likely that the guns seldom were fired. The sandy ground of the point no doubt caused problems similar to those present at the Castillo de San Joaquin at the Presidio, where the walls cracked and settled every time the guns were fired.

In 1822, as Spanish rule in California ended and Mexican rule began, the daughter of commandant Ygnacio Martinez of the Presidio of San Francisco noted that the Bateria San Jose was "a little baluarte, or fortification of triangular shape" with a single gun mounted. "There were no barracks at the place, no buildings of any kind...."<sup>3</sup> This indicates that the bateria had probably been abandoned. This may have been because ships did not anchor near or sail by Punta Medanos at that late date.

The Bateria San Jose was constructed to guard one of the prime anchorages along San Francisco's waterfront. Historian Bancroft stated that English

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<sup>1</sup> Erwin N. Thompson, Historic Resource Study: Seacoast Fortifications, San Francisco Harbor, Golden Gate National Recreation Area. (Denver: National Park Service, 1978) page 14.

<sup>2</sup> Historian Hubert Howe Bancroft, in his pioneer study History of California, (7 Volumes) (San Francisco: A.L. Bancroft and Company, 1886) frequently consulted the Spanish-Mexican Archives cited as the Provincial State Papers and the Provincial Records, which can be reviewed in the Bancroft Library at the University of California, Berkeley. The citations for his remarks on the Bateria San Jose can be seen in Volume 1, page 702, n. 12. The Bateria San Jose was also known, at times, as the Bateria Yerba Buena.

<sup>3</sup> As quoted in Thompson, Seacoast Fortifications, page 14.

explorer George Vancouver, when he visited in 1792, anchored off Punta Medanos, somewhere between Telegraph Hill and the former point. In addition, others may have followed Vancouver's lead in later years, namely English navigator Frederick W. Beechey, Russian explorer Otto von Kotzebue and other Europeans. All anchored near "Yerba Buena," which Bancroft defines as probably being (at that time) the shoreline between North Point and Punta Medanos. This might be possible, and the name Yerba Buena could have been applied to Yerba Buena Cove (between Clark's Point and Rincon Point) after 1827.<sup>4</sup> Regardless of the original location of "Yerba Buena," it seems highly unlikely that any vessel would have moored in Black Point Cove as the area "was too shallow to allow for the anchorage of ship inside the line of the headlands."<sup>5</sup>

The Bateria San Jose was the only structure standing in the vicinity of Black Point Cove until around 1836, when Juana Briones de Miranda (also known as "Senora Abarone") built an adobe home on the western slope of the present day intersection of Powell and Filbert Streets in North Beach.<sup>6</sup> Juana planted a garden, raised some cattle, and occasionally supplied visiting sailors with milk and vegetables. Sailor William Thomes recorded one such visit:

Senora Abarone, was already stirring when we reached her premises. Her shrill voice was heard from afar, scolding her servants, and urging them to do many things at the same time; yet, when she saw French Lewey and me, she gave us a smiling welcome and pleasant good morning...If the men had some of the energy of that buxom, dark-faced lady, California would have been a prosperous state....<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Bancroft makes a good case for an alternative anchorage for vessels which for many reasons did not choose to anchor at the official Presidio anchorage near today's Fort Point Life-Saving Station. See Bancroft, History of California, II, 589-590, n. 12.

<sup>5</sup> This has been carefully shown by Historians Roger and Nancy Olmsted, who have made detailed studies of the various coast charts and soundings for the San Francisco waterfront dating from 1852. See Olmsted and Olmsted, San Francisco Waterfront: Report on Historical Cultural Resources. (San Francisco: Wastewater Management Program, 1977) pages 592-593. The Olmsteds, incidently, feel that the anchorage of the explorers was probably in the Yerba Buena Cove area, now filled and buried beneath San Francisco's financial district.

<sup>6</sup> Bancroft cites Hittell as his source in locating the Briones de Miranda homesite. History of California, III, 709, n. 10.

<sup>7</sup> William Thomes, On Land and Sea. (Boston: DeWolfe, Fiske & Co., 1884) as quoted in Florence M. Fava, Los Altos Hills, The Colorful Story. (Woodside: Gilbert Richards Publications, 1976) pages 36-37.

Thomes mentioned that Juana proposed to deliver milk to the sailors' ship in her freshly scrubbed chamber pot; Thomes politely refused.<sup>8</sup>

Juana Briones de Miranda moved into a new home on the Rancho la Purisima Concepcion near Santa Clara sometime around 1844-1845. She retained her adobe home at North Beach, finally selling it to Henry Flannery and Gilbert Fancher in 1858. The ultimate fate of the structure is unknown.

With the exception of the distant Briones-Miranda adobe and the abandoned Bateria San Jose, the Black Point Cove area was unoccupied until the American conquest of California in 1846. That year American troops occupied the various Spanish-Mexican fortifications of San Francisco. The Bateria San Jose was not mentioned, indicating by that time the guns had been removed and the adobe and timber fortification had to completely disintegrate. The fact that Americans fortifying Yerba Buena Cove with a small battery of Spanish-Mexican cannon taken from the Castillo de San Joaquin at the Golden Gate and other locations in the north bay is further proof that there were no guns at the nearby site of the Bateria San Jose.<sup>9</sup>

The lack of fortifications at Punta Medanos did not blind American military engineers to the possibilities of fortification and the land was recommended, along with Black Point cove, for inclusion in a military reservation as early as 1848. In 1850, President Millard Fillmore established a large military reservation beginning at Punta Medanos and running west to the Presidio; in 1851, the boundaries were modified to create a separate military reservation, the "Point San Jose Military Reservation," with its boundaries being "an arc of eight hundred yards from its northern extremity, from shore to shore."<sup>10</sup> With this, the military use of Black Point Cove, which had begun in 1797 with the construction of the Bateria San Jose, was continued.

Despite the designation of Punta Medanos and Black Point Cove as part of the military reservation, the military did not immediately occupy the lands. This would create many problems in future years. As early as 1852, after the designation of the reservation, private citizens began openly squatting on the land and building houses. Punta Medanos, long since renamed "Black Point" by

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8 Fava, page 37.

9 Historian Thompson, in his Historic Resource Study, Seacoast Fortifications, cites an eyewitness to the arming of the battery, unofficially known as Fort Montgomery, at today's intersection of Battery and Broadway Streets. Page 16, n.14.

10 Erwin N. Thompson in his Historic Resource Study: Fort Mason, Golden Gate National Recreation Area, California. (Denver: National Park Service, 1980) page 2, n. 2. discusses the boundary question. The original Executive Orders for the creation of the military reservation are cited in John W. Dwinelle; The Colonial History of San Francisco... (San Francisco: Towne & Bacon, 1867) pages 221-223.

the Americans because of large stands of laurel or the "black rock" of the point which made it stand out darkly on the shoreline, was a handsome piece of real estate with a spectacular view of the bay and the Golden Gate. Several large private homes, many built by prominent citizens, began to dot Black Point. As one military officer noted, "every attempt was made by the military authorities to keep off trespassers, but they were persistent and numerous, and the efforts failed utterly so far as the Point San Jose reservation was concerned."<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> The military's problems with the squatters on the Black Point military reservation (also called the Point San Jose Military Reservation after the defunct Bateria San Jose) would, as historian Thompson notes, require a massive tome." Thompson gives an adequate account of the army's problems with the squatters in his Historic Resource Study: Fort Mason...pages 2-17. The officer quoted is Lieutenant H. G. Gibson. See Thompson, Fort Mason, page 3.

## 2. BLACK POINT COVE AND PIONEER INDUSTRY, 1857-1885

In addition to the problems with squatters on Black Point, the military also had to contend with squatters on the shores of Black Point Cove. While the cove was still part of the military reservation, three pioneer San Francisco businesses had begun operations; these were the San Francisco Water Company, the Pioneer Woolen Mills, and the Selby Smelting and Lead Company. These firms would eventually succeed in wresting control of Black Point Cove from the military.

### A. Pioneer Woolen Mills

California gained its first woolen mill in 1858 when the firm of Heynemann, Pick and Company of San Francisco opened their Pioneer Woolen Mills at Black Point Cove, openly squatting on the military reservation. According to Bancroft, wool manufacture would not have been possible in California if it had not been for the relatively inexpensive Chinese labor available; from the start, the Pioneer Woolen Mills almost exclusively hired Chinese laborers.<sup>12</sup>

As built, the Pioneer Woolen Mills complex at Black Point Cove was a group of wooden buildings containing sixteen looms and four sets of cards. In addition, Heynemann boarded his Chinese laborers on the premises in a dormitory built by the company.<sup>13</sup> The first Pioneer Woolen Mills buildings were wood frame structures built approximately at the foot of Polk Street along what would later be the south edge of Beach Street. The earliest known photograph of the mills shows a two story rectangular structure with a large sign marked "San Francisco Woolen Factory." There are two structures immediately to the east of this large building; they were doubtless associated with the mill operation. In front of the mill, approximately where the Aquatic Park bathhouse is presently located, a wooden wall was constructed and backfilled to create a landing. From the beginning, the mill did well, despite the high costs involved in "importing suitable machinery and skilled laborers..."<sup>14</sup> Primarily dealing in coarse wool goods, the company greatly improved the property, building bulkheads, removing drifting sand dunes, and building a road to the property.<sup>15</sup> Business did so well, in fact, that an otherwise

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<sup>12</sup> L. Eve Armentrout-Ma, "Chinese and GGNRA, 1849-1949: Guests of Choice, Guests of Necessity." Typescript in the files of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area, San Francisco, page 67.

<sup>13</sup> Armentrout-Ma, page 67.

<sup>14</sup> Anna Coxe Toogood, Historic Resource Study, A Civil History of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area... (Denver: National Park Service, 1980) Volume II page 98.

<sup>15</sup> Letter of N. Heynemann to General E.O.C. Ord, September 1869. Land Papers, Office of the Corps of Engineers, Record Group 77, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

disastrous fire that destroyed the buildings and machinery in October 24, 1861 did little to dampen the enthusiasm of the owners. A new building was soon constructed with brick "on a larger scale."<sup>16</sup> These structures were built at the same site as the previous wooden buildings and are first shown in detail in an 1868 map of the area.<sup>17</sup> Nine structures are shown in the mill complex, which was roughly bordered by Van Ness Avenue, Polk Street, Beach Street, and Bay Street. The largest structures, marked "Pioneer Woolen Factory," were located on the slope of the hill along Beach Street. The easternmost structure, a rectangular structure, is the "Woolen Mill" brick building in the modern Ghiradelli Square complex. The other mill structure was located at the present site of the Eastman-Kodak building. A "boarding house," probably for the Chinese mill hands, was located on Bay Street, next to a stables and "drying" building. With a concerted effort, the mills were "in operation again within eight months.

The new woolen mills opened with "nine sets of cards, thirty-one looms, 2,800 spindles, and fifty-two sewing machines."<sup>18</sup> Some 220 employees worked in the mill, earning up to \$100,000 collectively at wages running from \$.90 to \$1.50 per hour, depending on the skill of the individual employee.<sup>19</sup> The manufactured woolen items included blankets, flannel, tweeds and cashmeres. The product was so superior, notes Bancroft, that:

...for the fineness of its wool (California) and the substantial nature of the blankets, cloths, and flannels, have acquired a wide fame, sustained by premiums and gold medals, so that a considerable amount is exported. The cloth fabrics are as yet remarkable for strength rather than fineness, and while the local mills have since 1865 almost driven out foreign goods in their line...<sup>20</sup>

The productivity of the Pioneer Mill was phenomenal; in 1882 the mills produced "at least 30,000 pairs of blankets, as well as flannels, cashmere, doeskins, robes, and ladies cloakings, consuming thereby about 3,500,000 pounds of wool and 100,000 pounds of cotton, with a total value in manufactured items worth \$1,500,000."<sup>21</sup> Heynemann no doubt owed much to his

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<sup>16</sup> Toogood, Volume II, page 98.

<sup>17</sup> Map of Point San Jose, San Francisco Harbor, Calif. "Made Under the Direction of the Board of Engineers, Pacific Coast...1868." Map Drawer 90, Sheet 4. National Archives, Washington, D.C.

<sup>18</sup> San Francisco Daily Alta California, September 12, 1865, as quoted in Toogood, page 98.

<sup>19</sup> Armentrout-Ma, page 67.

<sup>20</sup> Bancroft, History of California, VII, page 88.

<sup>21</sup> Toogood, page 98.

employees for such successful figures. Unlike many whites of the time, "Heynemann thought highly of his employees, noting that they were both good workers and peaceable..."<sup>22</sup>

The woolen mills had done so well that in or around 1876 they absorbed another woolen mill, the Mission Woolen Mill, which employed some 300 Chinese and 250 white workers.<sup>23</sup> The Mission Woolen Mill was relocated to Black Point Cove, where the brick buildings of the Pioneer Woolen Mills were modified to allow the addition of the new workers and machinery. With the combined production of the two mills, "woolen products in San Francisco and California were cheaper than they had been when imported during the 1850s."<sup>24</sup> The mill continued to hire Chinese laborers, replacing most of the Mission Woolen Mills' white labor force.<sup>25</sup>

Ironically, it was Heynemann's excellent Chinese workers who were to indirectly cause the failure of the business. After surviving the military's attempt to evict the mills in 1869, Heynemann's business was to founder after the forces of anti-Chinese agitation forced him to fire his Chinese employees.<sup>26</sup> Ironically, the mills had survived an earlier anti-Chinese outbreak in 1880.<sup>27</sup> Without his cheap and efficient labor force, Heynemann could not compete with the lower prices of imported wools. Despite historian Bancroft's 1889 allegation that without the Chinese, California "must have...deferred...the establishment of many manufacturers, such as woolen

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22 Chinese Six Companies: An Address to the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States. (San Francisco: Chinese Six Companies, 1877), as quoted in Armentrout-Ma, pages 67-68. Heynemann testified before a Federal committee as to his high estimation of the Chinese employees of the Pioneer Woolen Mills.

23 Toogood, Vol. I, page 98.

24 Toogood, Vol. I, page 98.

25 Armentrout-Ma, page 68.

26 In 1869, the military decided to evict the squatters at Black Point Cove. Prior to this time, "the Army did not require these low-lying reservation areas for defensive or garrison purposes and tended to ignore the occupants. These particular squatters, however, refused to consider themselves as such and they applied pressure to various authorities to have their land claims verified. This movement gradually achieved success and an Act of Congress, approved July 1, 1870, reduced the Point San Jose reservation..." excluding the area of Black Point Cove. See Thompson, Fort Mason, page 5.

27 Alexander Saxton, The Indispensable Enemy: Labor and the Anti-Chinese Movement in California. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1971), page 147.

ills, which all help to provide more employment for superior white men...", Bancroft's "superior white men" and their high wages drove the Pioneer and Mission Woolen Mills out of business in 1889.<sup>28</sup> According to historian Toogood, the higher wages of the now all white staff, coupled with "expenses for coal and water worked against the business."<sup>29</sup> Accordingly, in 1889, the factory, which at that time was the largest on the west coast, fired its employees and closed the doors. The official reason cited was "the strong competition from Eastern woolen factories had undermined the Pioneer Woolen Mills by flooding the market with low-priced fabrics."<sup>30</sup> The buildings were to stand vacant for several years. In 1894, the firm attempted to dispose of them to the Lick trust for \$125,000, but to little avail.<sup>31</sup> One of the buildings would eventually be incorporated into a new business, the chocolate manufacturing firm of Domingo Ghiradelli.

#### B. San Francisco Water Company

With the California gold rush and the resultant boom in population in San Francisco, the availability of fresh water for the new metropolis and its large amount of residents became a major problem. While there were a few fresh water wells in San Francisco, their total outflow was insufficient for the needs of the growing city. In addition, many of these wells were located on private property and were not subject to public use. As a result, several individual businesses dealing with water were begun. However, this was a minor solution for a major problem that would not be solved until the advent in the early twentieth century of abundant water from the Sierra valley of Hetch-Hetchy under the control of the municipal government.

At first, San Francisco were supplied with fresh water by water carriers, usually Indians or Hispanics, who brought fresh water into town stored in casks on mule back from which they would issue the water by the bucket. The cost for a bucket of water was usually understood to be one dollar. Some of the water-carriers were supplied by local springs and wells in the town limits, but most were forced to go as far as El Polin, a spring inside the Presidio Military Reservation, or Mountain Lake, both being some four miles west of the town.

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<sup>28</sup> Bancroft, History of California, VII, page 72. Bancroft may have partially realized the economic folly of his advocacy of all-white labor, for he also noted that "the question arises whether it might not have been better to await the cheapening of white labor." History of California, page 72, n. 2.

<sup>29</sup> Toogood, Vol. II, page 99.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

In addition to the water carriers, San Francisco was also supplied by William A. Richardson and Manuel Torres, who operated the Sausalito Water Company. Beginning in or around 1850, Richardson, a California pioneer of long standing and grantee of the large Rancho Sausalito in Marin County, began shipping fresh water over by barge from his property in Marin. "This water, which came originally from springs in the adjacent hills, was conducted to the beach and collected in 2 tanks respectively 30 and 60 feet square, and eight feet high."<sup>32</sup>

The water was brought in and pumped into large redwood tanks located on the decks of an abandoned gold rush ship, the Cordova. Moored near the present day intersection of Washington and Davis Streets, which were then part of the Bay, the Cordova, "an American vessel...was bought by Captain Bowman from Goodall & Nelson for Palmer Cooke, and Company. Goodall & Nelson used her for a water ship, where vessels and housekeepers could get a supply of good water. Water sold for \$1 and \$3 a bucket in those days."<sup>33</sup> Apparently Goodall & Nelson bought their water from Richardson and Torres and acted as the middlemen since another account mentioned that the Cordova was used as a "receiver for Sausalito water."<sup>34</sup> The price of water varied in the inflated gold rush market, where supply and demand frequently and quickly changed. One source states, for example, that the going price for Sausalito water was between five and twelve cents a pail.<sup>35</sup>

Fierce competition between Richardson and the water carriers culminated in the mid-1850s, when, following Richardson's demise, the water carriers organized and collectively were able to offer cheaper prices than those of the Sausalito Water Company. Torres, the surviving partner, may have abandoned the business in favor of attempting to preserve his father-in-law's now threatened land holdings from squatter's inroads.

Despite their victory over the Sausalito Water Company, the water-carriers had little cause for elation. Their victory was essentially pyrrhic; the water-carriers did not have the resources or the man-power to solve the city's water problems and soon they would be overshadowed by larger groups that would. The

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32 John S. Hittell, The Commerce and Industries of the Pacific Coast of North America. (San Francisco: A.L. Bancroft and Company, 1882) page 409.

33 San Francisco Examiner, August 31, 1890.

34 San Francisco Daily Alta California, August 22, 1882.

35 Roger Lotchin, San Francisco, 1846-1856: From Hamlet to City. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974) page 182. It should be noted that Lotchin frequently footnotes his book with contemporary newspaper article citations; and while he does not footnote his source for the water prices, they must be based upon an overall survey of the advertisements in the contemporary newspapers in San Francisco and are hence more reliable than the reminiscences cited in #s 33 and 34.

water carriers must have had some sense of impending doom in March of 1851, when Azro Merrifield petitioned the San Francisco Town Council for permission to supply the city's water needs through a pipeline from Mountain Lake. Merrifield's petition was approved by the Town Council in June of the same year. Unfortunately for San Francisco, Merrifield was never to complete his system. Merrifield left town in late 1851 and his franchise passed into other hands who were equally unable to deliver a final product. Finally, the backers were given until January 1, 1857 to deliver water to San Francisco and no later by the Town Council. The deadline passed without improvement and the franchise passed into other hands.

San Francisco achieved a permanent and somewhat regular water system with the introduction of the new company, which was popularly known as the Bensley Company but was formally known as the San Francisco Water Company. The firm, headed by Mexican War veteran John Bensley, a San Francisco capitalist, proposed to build a dam on Lobos Creek on the west shore of the city, collect the water, and send it into town by means of a redwood flume to a pumping station on the shores of Black Point lagoon near the Pioneer Woolen Mills. The water would then be pumped up Russian Hill into large reservoirs for later gravitational distribution to water mains throughout the city.

Work on the new system commenced in early 1857. An earth dam was built across Lobos Creek to impound the waters, and the construction of the redwood flume began. On May 30, 1857, the San Francisco Daily Globe remarked that "The Bensley Company have already contracted for a large amount of labor for the construction of their flume. They have built a dam over Lobos Creek, have made some excavations along the proposed route, and have constructed a short portion of the flume next to the dam." The finished flume stood on wooden stilts as it ran along the rugged shoreline of San Francisco. Over four feet high and three feet wide, the water trough was covered with boards to keep debris from fouling the water, creating a "road" of sorts. The flume often served as a walkway for adventurous hikers:

Beyond Black Point we climbed a trestle and mounted a flume that was our highway to the sea. Through this flume the city was supplied with water. The flume was a square trough, open at the top and several miles in length. It was cased in a heavy frame; and along the timbers that crossed over it lay planks, one after another, wherever the flume was uncovered. This narrow path, intended for the convenience of the workmen who kept the flume in repair, was our delight. We followed it in the full assurance that we were running a great risk. Beneath us was the open trough, where the water, two or three feet in depth, was rushing as in a mill-race. Had we fallen, we must have been swept along with it, and perhaps to our doom. Sometimes we were many feet in the air, crossing a cove where the sea broke at high tide; sometimes we were in cut among the rocks on a jutting point; and sometimes the sand from the desert above us drifted down and buried the flume, now roofed over, quite out of sight.<sup>36</sup>

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36 Charles Warren Stoddard, In the Footprints of the Padres. (San Francisco: A.M. Robertson, 1901) pages 72-73.

The flume, being built of wood along the unstable cliffs and hillsides of the San Francisco waterfront, was highly susceptible to slide damage, and several times winter storms broke off the city's water supply when a portion of the flume was carried away. Winter storms in late 1861 and early 1862 damaged the flume, spurring the Bensley Company to begin construction of a brick conduit in the slide susceptible areas to replace the wooden flume. Construction of the brick conduit began in the spring of 1862. The San Francisco Daily Evening Bulletin reported, in August of that year, that

the tunnel of the Bensley Water Company, now rapidly progressing through Fort Point Hill, will be 3,790 feet long, over two-thirds of a mile. It will be arched, of solid masonry, and large enough to allow a skiff to pass from end to end....The storm of last winter proved the worthlessness of flumes of redwood, causing a loss to the company in repairs and stoppage of water rents of over \$20,000. It was at this time that complaints were made of impurity of the Bensley water; now it is as clear and soft as could be desired.<sup>37</sup>

Another tunnel was apparently constructed through Black Point, as the Bulletin also reported

The tunnel of masonry through Black Point now nearly finished, is 2,812 feet long, is solidly arched, and some of the excavation is through hard rock costing \$15 per foot to construct it. The conduit of masonry is conducted through projecting points by other tunnels until it reaches the large valley between the barracks and Fort Point.<sup>38</sup>

While the Bensley Company vowed to replace the entire flume with brick conduits and tunnels, the project was never completed and the redwood flume was replaced only by the tunnels through Fort Point Hill and Black Point, the latter apparently after 1862. Photographs of the Black Point area prior to this time show the flume in place but do not show it after 1862-1863, when it would have apparently been dismantled after the brick conduit was operating.

The flume continued in use beyond Fort Point Hill along the rugged shore of Baker's Beach, ending at Lobos Creek. The flume was still in operation in 1887, when it was used as an alternate water supply by the Spring Valley Water Company, which had assimilated the Bensley Company and was also the main water supply for the Presidio of San Francisco. According to Colonel G.H. Mendell, the water supply of the Presidio, particularly Fort Winfield Scott (now known as Fort Point), came from

...the conduit of the Spring Valley Water Company, which is the city's water supply. One of its conduits carrying about 2 million

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<sup>37</sup> San Francisco Daily Evening Bulletin, August 22, 1862.

<sup>38</sup> San Francisco Bulletin, August 25, 1862.

gallons daily, derives its supply from Lobos Creek. The conduit passes along the shore boundary of the Presidio reservation on its western side and is carried to the Eastern shore, through a tunnel under the hill a few hundred feet near and north (sic) of the fort. It is tapped by a pipe....<sup>39</sup>

The flume remained in operation until around 1893, when construction activity in the Richmond District on the banks of Lobos Creek polluted the water. "The abandoned flume slowly decayed."<sup>40</sup>

As late as 1975, traces of the flume could still be found on the hillsides of Baker Beach. National Park Service Archaeologist Roger Kelly noted that

fragments of wooden planks, possibly the bottom of the flume.... portions of concrete supports for the flume...(and) a short cross section of flume sides and bottom are visible as imbedded in the earthern material of the seacliff.<sup>41</sup>

Various members of the park staff stationed in the area have noted other traces of flume that have been uncovered in small landslides, particularly after rains, and it is likely that other portions will be encountered in the future. To date, however, no remains of the flume or its supports have been found on Black Point.

The water carried to Black Point by the flume was pumped into large storage reservoirs on Russian Hill. The first water arrived on July 16, 1858, and was pumped up the hill into the reservoirs. As time progressed, improvements to the machinery enabled the engineers of the Bensley Company to pump more water, increasing the storage potential of the reservoirs, which were enlarged. The pump station, which was built in 1857, was operated by steam. According to an 1860 description of the station,

The pumping station at Black Point consists of an engine of 100-horse power, working a pump of capacity sufficient to raise 1,400,000 gallons 140 feet high in 24 hours, with facilities for the attachment of another to raise half that quantity 300 feet at the same time. The present pump raises water into a reservoir of 8,000,000 gallons capacity, situated at the corner of Francisco and Hyde Streets, at an elevation above the bay of 145 feet...there are

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39 Report of Colonel G.H. Mendell, January 20, 1887. Records of the Office of the Chief of Engineers, First Division, Record Group 77, National Archives.

40 John E. Behan, "Lobos Creek." San Francisco Water, Vol I No 1, January 1922, page 6.

41 Roger E. Kelly, Archeological Resources of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area, page 61.

already laid in the city 74,000 feet of pipe, extending from North Beach to and beyond South Park, supplying most of the thickly settled part of the city....<sup>42</sup>

The same year construction began for an additional reservoir, capacity 3,600,000 gallons, at the corner of Hyde and Greenwich Streets. The new reservoir was in use by early 1861, and to meet the new demand, the pumping station capacity had been raised to pump 2,000,000 gallons in 24 hours.<sup>43</sup> In 1864 the interior of the pumping station was changed to allow the introduction of "two steam engines of two hundred and fifty horse power each..."<sup>44</sup> At this same time, a brick chimney for the new steam engines was installed at the rear of the station, replacing an original metal flue.

The San Francisco Water Company had by this time been sold to its rival firm, the Spring Valley Water Company. The Spring Valley Water Company had been established in 1858, just one year after the Bensley Company, and had rapidly become a major competitor with the San Francisco Water Company. Finally, the Bensley Company was driven out of business in 1864 after a bizarre chain of events. In May of 1864, the San Francisco newspapers announced that the two companies were at "loggerheads" over what San Francisco newspaper The American Flag termed a "gigantic swindle." An "astounding discovery" had been made:

...there are two large companies which supply the city of San Francisco with water--one called the Spring Valley Water Works Company, and the other called the San Francisco Water Works Company, commonly known as the Bensley Company. Yesterday morning, considerable excitement was created by the discovery of a pipe leading from the main pipe of one to that of the other, and through which it is estimated the Bensley Company has been receiving nearly 1,000,000 gallons of water every 24 hours, for several months past, at the expense of the Spring Valley Company.<sup>45</sup>

What followed were several days of charges and counter-charges, followed by the arrest, on May 8, of three employees of the Bensley Company for grand larceny in the theft of some \$80,000 worth of water from the Spring Valley Water Company. The case dragged through the courts, with the Bensley firm finally agreeing to pay the costs of the stolen water to Spring Valley. Then, in late 1864, it was announced that "The Water Companies to be Consolidated." According to the story,

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<sup>42</sup> San Francisco City Directory for 1860, page 36.

<sup>43</sup> City Directory, 1860, page 36; and City Directory, 1861, pages 37-38.

<sup>44</sup> City Directory, 1865, page 44.

<sup>45</sup> The American Flag, May 7, 1864.

The San Francisco Water Company (known as the Bensley) and the Spring Valley Water Company are about to consolidate in one joint stock association, with a nominal capital of \$6,000,000. The matter is now in the hands of a committee from both companies. The terms are said to have been agreed upon, although they are for the present withheld.<sup>46</sup>

The San Francisco Daily Morning Call of February 11, 1865, announced that the consolidation had taken place, with the new company, the Spring Valley Works Company, having "filed their certificate in the county clerk's office yesterday." With this, the redwood flume, and the Black Point Pumping Station became part of the Spring Valley Water Company system. The Spring Valley Water Company continued to grow through the years since it was the major water supply company for the city. At various times the City and County of San Francisco negotiated for the purchase of the system, but a purchase deal was not completed until 1928, when San Francisco voters overwhelmingly approved the acquisition of Spring Valley's system. In 1930, the city formally took over the operation of the company.<sup>47</sup> In the meanwhile, San Francisco had completed a great water system; a fantastic concrete dam in Yosemite's Hetch-Hetchy Valley and a water distribution system that crossed the state. With this, the problems of adequate water supply that had plagued the city since its gold rush beginnings almost a century before were finally solved.

The Black Point pumping station had become part of the greater Spring Valley Water Company system in 1865. After the water supply from Lobos Creek was phased out, the station was adapted and enlarged and put to work pumping water from various city reservoirs into the mains. In 1911, to aid in the task, the original boilers were replaced.<sup>48</sup> In 1926, an article in the official company organ stated that the station at Black Point "now receives water from University Mount and lifts it to Presidio Heights."<sup>49</sup>

The station apparently remained in operation after the acquisition of the Spring Valley system by the City and County of San Francisco in 1930. The station was doomed, however, it seemed, by the planned development of an Aquatic Park in the area. The regrading and the resultant higher slope of Van Ness Avenue would call for the demolition of the station if carried out. Fortunately, the development spared the station when a cobblestone retaining wall was constructed against the new hill slope in 1935. This wall is the

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<sup>46</sup> San Francisco Daily Alta California, February 11, 1865.

<sup>47</sup> The bond act was passed by a vote of 82,490 for as opposed to 21,171 against. See San Francisco Water Supply, pamphlet, San Francisco Archives, Main Library, page 6.

<sup>48</sup> Original Photograph Books and Albums, "San Francisco Water Improvements" San Francisco Archives, Main Library.

<sup>49</sup> San Francisco Water, Volume 5, Number 1, January 1926, page 22.

only surviving visual feature of the old pump station, which was apparently demolished between 1940 and 1950, the exact date being unknown at the time of this writing.<sup>50</sup> The site is today marked by the Bocce Ball courts and the "sandpit" of Aquatic Park. The rear portions of the station, notably the site of the brick smokestack, appear to have been covered over or demolished by the construction of the Eastman-Kodak warehouse in the early 1960s. However, buried archaeological remains of the pump station, particularly in the sand pit area, may exist beneath several feet of fill. Preliminary archaeological testing has revealed some evidence of brick and fragments of slate shingles.<sup>51</sup>

#### C. Selby Smelting and Lead Company

Prior to the 1860s, mining activity in California produced very few ores which required smelting. Most of the gold being mined in the Sierras was placer gold, which was extracted or panned in almost pure form, and quicksilver deposits at New Almaden in Santa Clara County were retorted and not smelted. The small amounts of metals mined that required smelting or reduction were "relatively simple ores that could be treated by stamp milling and 'pan amalgamation'..." with quicksilver.<sup>52</sup> However, with the discovery and development of the mines of central and eastern Nevada, notably the silver deposits of the Comstock Lode, smelting was essential.

Smelting, an involved process that requires technical expertise, involves

converting the ore into a "fluid state by means of heat and chemicals," and then separating "metallic from the earthy ingredients by means of their specific gravity," is an art that demands both theoretical understanding and knowledge of practical details. Few men of the mining West who had not had formal training in chemistry, metallurgy, and mineralogy were likely to practice it successfully....An inexperienced person was all too prone to select from the contemporary manuals a process that was ill-suited to his particular local ores....<sup>53</sup>

With the development of the Nevada mines, several small smelters went into operation, usually operated by "veteran Welsh or Cornish smelting men or one

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50 Photographs of the area show the structures in the early 1940s; a 1952 photograph shows that the structure was removed prior to that time. Unfortunately, the San Francisco Water Works claims to have no records of the later operation or the ultimate demolition of the building.

51 James Delgado, Martin Mayer, John Martini; "Preliminary Archeological Reconnaissance of the Sandpit at Aquatic Park." (San Francisco: National Park Service, 1980)

52 Rodman W. Paul; Mining Frontiers of the Far West: 1848-1880. (Albuquerque: University of Mexico Press, 1974). Page 99.

53 Ibid.

of the few University-trained engineers.<sup>54</sup> These small smelting operations, however, were plagued with infrequent field supplies, infrequent ore, and untrained personnel. What was needed were "a few large smelters, centrally located in regard to both ores and fuels."<sup>55</sup> This need was filled and the inherent worth of such an operation was proved with the establishment of the Selby Smelting and Lead Company in San Francisco.

Thomas H. Selby was a San Francisco businessman who had come to California like so many other men during the gold rush of 1849. Selby's earlier dry goods business in his native New York had failed, and his wife had died abruptly in 1848. Selby was thus open to the suggestion of moving on and starting anew in 1849 when "Mr. Peter Naylor, a man of considerable means, a dealer in metals, iron, etc., and also the owner of a shot-tower, approached Mr. Selby and offered him a full partnership if he would come to California."<sup>56</sup> Arriving in San Francisco in August of 1849, Selby opened a store for the firm and did quite well, surviving the many fires that swept through the gold rush town and ruined many other business enterprises. Ironically, it was another fire which apparently suggested the smelting business to Selby.

In 1863, the firm had placed a large amount of coal on an adjacent lot with some lead pipe that the company sold. A fire broke out in the coal and melted the pipe. When the fire cooled, Selby and his partner "recovered some fifty tons of lead from the ground. There was no market for this pig lead, and that fact may have suggested the building of the shot tower."<sup>57</sup>

Selby constructed a "shot tower" for the manufacture of lead bullets and shot in 1865. According to one historian, the shot was formed in the Selby tower when

Lead dropped from the tower passed molten through a series of sieves into water, thereby creating shot. It was not a new process even then.<sup>58</sup>

From manufacturing lead shot to smelting lead and silver was a large step, for Thomas H. Selby and his company. Formerly importing metals such as "Bar and

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54 Paul, page 101.

55 Ibid, page 101.

56 "Statement of Thomas Henry Selby, Facts gathered by Geo. H. Morrison for the use of Mr. Hubert Howe Bancroft, in completing his West Coast history." Typescript, 16 pages, the Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, page 3.

57 Ibid, page 5.

58 William F. Heintz; San Francisco's Mayors, 1850-1880. (Woodside: Gilbert Richards Publications, 1975), page 68.

Plate Iron, Cast Steel, Sheet Copper, Zinc, and all kinds of Plumbing Goods," Selby worked to become ready for the smelting of ore and manufacture of metal goods.<sup>59</sup>

With the discovery of increasing amounts of silver and other precious metals in the West, Selby decided that the firm could go into the large scale smelting operation the new mines required. In 1867 the company moved into a large smelting plant located on the eastern shore of Black Point Cove, approximately at the present day intersections of Hyde and Beach and Leavenworth and Beach. The cost of the new plant was reportedly \$100,000.<sup>60</sup> The operation was almost immediately successful, for

Unlike the smelting operators of the Great Basin, Selby had the capital and could hire the skilled supervisors and large labor force needed, while his location at the queen city of the Far West also enabled him to draw raw materials from a wide variety of sources. In 1869-1870 he was buying ores from about twenty mines in California, Nevada, and Arizona. For most of these mines the Selby works constituted the only market....Even before starting construction of his plant, Selby established an ore-buying agency on the Colorado River, from which shipments could be made by water to San Francisco.<sup>61</sup>

The firm also began to refine and cast bullion, both gold and silver, and "became the only private refinery on the coast and the only refinery outside of the United States Mint."<sup>62</sup>

In 1870, the North Beach smelter operation was described by Historian Oscar Shuck:

Ores and crude metal, worth \$150,000, may at any time be seen piled up, awaiting reduction at the works, which give constant occupation to about seventy-five men; while, indirectly, several hundred miners are kept employed by this ready consumer of the product of their labor. Add to this another branch of industry, his San Francisco Shot Tower, and some idea may be formed of the extent and variety of his engagements....<sup>63</sup>

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59 San Francisco City Directory for 1875, page XV.

60 Paul, page 101.

61 Ibid, page 101.

62 Anonymous; The Bay of San Francisco: The Metropolis of the Pacific Coast and its Suburban Cities, A History. (Chicago: The Lewis Publishing Company, 1893, 1893). Page 434.

63 Oscar Shuck; Representative and Leading Men of the Pacific. (San Francisco: Bacon and Company, 1870). Page 419.

Selby purchased Naylor's interest in the firm, in 1873, reportedly "fearing that complications might arise in case his partner should die..."<sup>64</sup> Fearing what might happen if he would die, Selby arranged for the training of his son Prentiss, and "placed him with an assayer, when about 19, and subsequently gave him full charge of the works."<sup>65</sup> Selby needed someone to run the business for him, particularly since his habit of community involvement had culminated in 1869 when he was elected Mayor of San Francisco. Selby "served the city free, donating the salary of his office to various charitable institutions."<sup>66</sup> Selby was also active in many organizations, serving as

President of the Merchant's Exchange and as the first President of the Industrial School Association, President of the Board of Trustees of Calvary Church and of City College, and as a life director of the Mercantile Library Association.<sup>67</sup>

Selby was also, for a short time, considered for the nomination to the Governorship of California by the Republican Party, but he lost the nomination to Newton Booth, who was subsequently elected to office.<sup>68</sup>

Thomas Henry Selby died in San Francisco on June 9, 1875 at the age of fifty-five.<sup>69</sup> He had laid a strong foundation for his business, however, which continued to expand and profit under the direction of Selby's son, Prentiss. The company was described in 1882 as

...successful from the first, now supplies the entire (lead) consumption of the coast. The products of the industry, including sheet and bar lead, lead wire, pipe, and sash, shot, bullets, sheets and pipe of block-tin (tin alloyed with a small amount of antimony), Rabbitt metal, solder, bar-lead, and bar-tine, amount to about \$5,300 tons per annum, valued at \$825,000. Employment furnished to 150 hands, whose wages average \$2.50 per day of 10 hours. Of the raw materials consumed, lead and antimony are produced here in abundant quantity. Tin, of which about 5 tons are worked up monthly, comes from England and Australia; and graphite, used to gloss shot, etc., is also imported. About 150 tons of lead pipe are

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64 Selby Manuscript, Bancroft Library, page 6.

65 Ibid.

66 Gladys Hansen; San Francisco Almanac. (San Rafael: Presidio Press, 1890), page 86.

67 Ibid.

68 Selby Manuscript, Bancroft Library, page 13.

69 Alonzo Phelps; Contemporary Biography of California's Representative Men. (San Francisco: A.L. Bancroft and Company, 1881), page 423.

shipped to British Columbia, and small shipments are made to Mexico and the Hawaiian Islands...works comprise a 3-story brick building 70 by 80 feet....<sup>70</sup>

Historical photographs of the interior of the Selby Smelting Works show that Chinese laborers were employed, just as the neighboring Pioneer Woolen Mills also used Chinese labor.

The Selby Smelting and Lead Company soon found that their North Beach location, no matter how suitable it had seemed in 1867, was not conducive to the future expansion of the booming business. In 1885,

owing to inadequate facilities and the necessity of being located on a line of railroad, to secure greater convenience for handling of ores and bullion, and also requiring a deep-water frontage in receiving cargoes of coal and coke by ocean vessels, they purchased forty-three acres at Vallejo Junction, Contra Costa County, and began the erection of a very extensive plant.<sup>71</sup>

The North Beach plant was abandoned that year, the entire operation moving to the Contra Costa plant, around which the town of Selby would grow. The firm continued to do well, being purchased, in 1910, by the American Smelting and Refining Company.<sup>72</sup> The plant finally closed down in early 1971, ending well over a century of service to the mining activities of the West Coast.<sup>73</sup>

#### D. Haslett Warehouse

Following the removal of the Selby smelting operation to Contra Costa County in 1885, the site passed through a series of owners. Any Selby-built structures that stood on the site were demolished in April of 1906, when the great San Francisco earthquake and fire destroyed much of the city. Following the earthquake, plans were made to run a street through the property but never materialized. Instead, the California Fruit Canners Association leased the property and began construction of a cannery and storage warehouse. The two buildings, which were designed by prominent San Francisco architect William A. Mooser II, were built between 1907 and 1909, when they were completed and the cannery operations commenced.

Between 1909 and 1948, when the California Fruit Canners Association owned the two buildings, the cannery produced "preserved asparagus, tomatoes, pork and

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<sup>70</sup> Hittell, The Commerce and Industries of the Pacific Coast...., page 688.

<sup>71</sup> Bay of San Francisco, page 434.

<sup>72</sup> Oakland Tribune, November 26, 1961.

<sup>73</sup> Oakland Tribune, July 11, 1971.

beans, peaches, pears, cherries, apricots, and plums...<sup>74</sup> For many of those years, namely "from 1909 to 1936, the warehouse received canned goods prepared in the adjacent cannery building...Riverboats brought vegetables and fruits to San Francisco from Sacramento and other interior points and docked them at the wharf fronting the cannery."<sup>75</sup>

After 1936, the cannery closed and the two buildings were used as warehouses following the removal of the cannery operation to the East Bay. In addition to canned goods, the western warehouse also stored many other goods, the most unusual being the disassembled stones of the medieval Spanish Monasterio de Santa Maria de Avila, which were stored in the warehouse in 1930 until they made their way to Golden Gate Park, where they still repose, sans packing crates, at the rear of the DeYoung Museum. Other stored "goods" included the bodies of many deceased Chinese citizens which were to be shipped back to their homeland for burial.<sup>76</sup>

In 1948, the Warehouse Investment Corporation purchased the warehouse and leased it to their subsidiary firm, the Haslett Company, thus providing the building with its present name, the "Haslett Warehouse." The Haslett firm used the building for the storage of various goods until 1962, when the State of California condemned and purchased the building for \$729,000 for use as a transportation museum.<sup>77</sup> The Haslett Company remained until 1964, when the building was vacated for two years. In 1966, the upper stories of the building were leased to Abbott International, who renovated them for office space as the "Wharfside" development. The lower two stories remained vacant, with the bottom story being used for storage of some of the materials and artifacts from the State Maritime Historic Park located across the street at Hyde Street Pier.

On February 28, 1977, the Golden Gate National Recreation Area acquired the Haslett Warehouse. The tenants of "Wharfside" were allowed to stay under the terms of the acquisition of the building, which is now administered by the National Park Service.<sup>78</sup> The cannery building, however, remained in private ownership, and was remodeled extensively in 1967; to become a popular tourist attraction, "The Cannery."

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74 Anonymous, Special Study: Haslett Warehouse, San Francisco, California. Denver: National Park Service, circa 1975, page 13.

75 Ibid, page 13.

76 San Francisco Chronicle, January 1, 1961.

77 San Francisco Chronicle, November 1, 1962.

78 Conversation with G. Douglass Nadeau, Chief, Division of Resource Management and Planning, Golden Gate National Recreation Area, San Francisco, October 24, 1980.

## E. Ghiradelli Chocolate Company

The last industry to be located on the shores of Black Point Cove was the Ghiradelli chocolate operation. The Ghiradelli Chocolate Company was founded by Dominico Ghiradelli (also known as Domingo Ghiradelli after several years of residence in South America), an Italian-born confectioner. Establishing a business in Lima, Peru, Ghiradelli had settled down, marrying a local girl and fathering two children. However, the discovery of gold in California lured Ghiradelli. After mining for a few months, Ghiradelli first opened a store in Stockton and later opened a store in San Francisco. In 1852 he was listed in the San Francisco City Directory as "Ghiradelli, D, confectioner, 194 Wasn." Ghiradelli's business survived the destruction of his buildings in the many fires that levelled the gold rush town. In 1855 the company commenced the manufacture of chocolate; it was not until 1867, however, that Ghiradelli discovered the process for making the brand of chocolate that would make the company famous. Known as "broma," the chocolate may not have been Ghiradelli's exclusive discovery since

Independent discovery of approximately the same process may have been made by others. At any rate, along toward the middle 1860s someone in Ghiradelli's plant found that if you hang a bag of chocolate in a very warm room, the cocoa butter drips out, leaving the pulverized residue which becomes ground chocolate...in 1867, the first year of commercial production, the firm sold 571 pounds of its new product. Today's sales run into the millions of pounds.<sup>79</sup>

The firm was nearly closed in 1870 when Ghiradelli and his partner went bankrupt. The firm recovered "slowly but steadily, to greater prosperity...."<sup>80</sup> Ghiradelli's sons increasingly took part in running the family business, which in 1881 was named to "Ghiradelli and Sons." The firm continued to grow, with additional space for the manufacture and shipping of the chocolate soon becoming a pressing need. A solution was not reached until after the retirement of Dominico Ghiradelli in 1892. His sons, casting about for a new location, purchased the vacant buildings of the Pioneer Woolen Mills, which had been closed since the defunct mill closed its doors in 1889. A deal was consummated in 1893, and the firm moved onto the site, initially occupying the old woolen mill buildings but later within the space of forty years, adding many buildings to the "emerging manufacturing complex."<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Ruth Teiser, An Account of Domingo Ghiradelli and the Early Years of the D. Ghiradelli Company, (San Francisco: D. Ghiradelli Company, 1945), page 22.

<sup>80</sup> Teiser, page 23.

<sup>81</sup> Ghiradelli Square, "A Chronological History of Ghiradelli Chocolate and Ghiradelli Square." Typescript Manuscript, n.d., Ghiradelli Square, page 3.

Ghiradelli died while on a visit to his native Italy in 1894. The Ghiradelli sons managed their inheritance well, changing the firm's name to "D. Ghiradelli Company" in 1895. In 1947, Ghiradelli's firm was described

...the business he started so modestly nearly a century ago now converts tons of Brazilian and Central American cocoa beans into millions of pounds of ground, cake and sweet chocolate every year. Among its 105 plant employees are the descendants of some of the men and women who worked for him as far back as the 1860's. In the offices of its directors and officials sit his grandsons and great grandsons.<sup>82</sup>

In the early 1960s, the Ghiradelli Company had reached the conclusions the Selby Smelting and Lead Company had reached nearly eighty years previous; the North Beach location for the firm was too small and an east bay location was needed.

The old manufacturing complex was put up for sale and the Ghiradelli Company purchased a new site in San Leandro. In 1962,

...two San Franciscans, William M. Roth and his mother, Mrs. William P. Roth (members of the Matson shipping family), fearing the site might be acquired for highrise offices or apartments, purchased the property to preserve and convert the fine old buildings to a contemporary use.<sup>83</sup>

The "contemporary use" decided upon was the series of shops, galleries, and restaurants known as Ghiradelli Square. The project opened on November 29, 1964, "when the famous Ghiradelli rooftop sign blazed into life again...<sup>84</sup> having been blacked out during the Second World War and never relit. The Ghiradelli Square project was highly innovative and commendable; an era of recycling old and historic structures in the United States had begun. The conversion of Ghiradelli Square also marked a turning point in the development of the decaying waterfront area around Aquatic Park; soon the area was redeveloped into the series of shopping and eating complexes that would distinguish the Fisherman's Wharf and Aquatic Park area in the 1970s and 1980s. The pioneer industrial period in Black Point Cove has been appropriately remembered by three renovated structures; the Pioneer Woolen Mill building preserved in the Ghiradelli complex and remodeled as part of Ghiradelli Square as the "Woolen Mill," the Haslett Warehouse, renovated into the "Wharfside" office complex and slated for future remodeling into a major National Park Service museum and visitor center, and the cannery building of the California Fruit Canners Association, remodeled to become "The Cannery."

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82 San Francisco Chronicle, July 4, 1947.

83 Ghiradelli Square, "Ghiradelli Square: Historical Background and Present Status" n.d., Ghiradelli Square Management Office.

84 Ibid.

### 3. BLACK POINT ATTRACTS RECREATIONAL USES, 1864-1930

The sheltered cove, the sandy beaches, and the proximity to the city made Black Point Cove a favorite spot for recreation, despite its industrial use and appearance. As early as the 1860s San Franciscans were coming to Black Point Cove to enjoy a swim in the waters of the bay. To meet the needs of these swimmers, small bathing establishments, usually little more than a place to change and safely store one's clothes, went into business. These businesses would later give way to private clubs, which would be the strongest advocates for preserving Black Point Cove for the recreational purposes San Francisco had found desirable since the 1860s.

#### A. Earlier Bathhouses

When the earliest bathhouse was built on the shores of the cove is unknown. The pre-1861 photograph of the shores of the cove does not show any structure that could be a bathhouse.<sup>1</sup> However, it would seem that just a few years later at least one pioneer bathhouse was located at the cove. One newspaper reporter, thinking back to the early days of the cove, stated that

Swimming was a delight to the old-timers of the city. Early in the morning, from 6 to 9, the bay at the cove below Black Point was dotted with bobbing heads, swimming far out in the icy waters of the strait.<sup>2</sup> Later the enterprising ones started bathhouses along the beach.

It cannot be proved that the Black Point Cove bathhouses were founded by swimming enthusiasts, but it does seem likely. It is also possible that the employees of the woolen mill or their families may have participated in the aquatic enjoyment of Black Point Cove; the earliest proprietor of the Neptune Bathhouse at Black Point Cover was Joseph Dunkely (sometimes spelled Dunkerly). An "Edward Dunkelly," who may have been a relative, was listed in the 1865 City Directory as a "spinner, Pioneer Woolen Mills" with a residence at the "NW cor Beach and Larkin."

The first mention of a bathhouse at Black Point does not come from the city directories, which are silent until 1871. Rather, court testimony in the 1890s concerning the character and development of the Black Point area in the 1860s has a mention of a bathhouse at the beach. One witness, George F. Stanton, stated that "sometime during the years from 1854 to 1864 I remember of (sic) seeing a bathhouse on the beach at the foot of Larkin street."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The earliest known photograph of the cove shows the Pioneer Woolen Mills, the Bensley flume, and several houses on Russian Hill...but not a structure that could be identified as a bathhouse.

<sup>2</sup> San Francisco Bulletin, November 13, 1924.

<sup>3</sup> Deposition of George F. Stanton, May 9, 1893. Library, Society of California Pioneers, San Francisco.

Stanton's testimony was corroborated by Dennis Mahoney, who had been involved in the construction of the Fort Point-Bay Shore Toll Road and the Selby Smelting Works. Mahoney said

I remember in 1863 when I first knew this block, of seeing a small shanty on the beach at the foot of Larkin Street; it was a sort of a bathhouse. At the corner of Larkin and Beach Streets there were steps leading down on the beach and to this shanty.<sup>4</sup>

The "small shanty" mentioned by both Stanton and Mahoney may be the bathhouse listed in the 1871 city directory as the "Sea Baths" operated by Joseph Dunkerly at the corner of Beach and Larkin.<sup>5</sup> The steep slope of the ridge that ran along the line of present day Beach Street (and described by Alex Taylor in 1861 as "a precipice of forty or fifty feet...the waters of the bay ...surge and moan at the rocky base."<sup>6</sup>) would have made the stairway down to the bathhouse a necessity.

Joseph Dunkely operated the bathhouse as late as 1874 or 1876, according to the city directories. And, if the historical record is correct, he was the proprietor of the bathhouse in August of 1875 when San Francisco banker William Chapman Ralston took an ill-fated swim in Black Point Cove. The bathhouse was apparently known as the Neptune Bath House by this time, although the name does not appear in the city directories until 1877. A drawing of the beach, done for Harper's Weekly of September 25, 1875, showed the bathhouse at the base of the steep sandy slope, accessible only by the stairs leading from Beach Street above. The bathhouse was a mismatched series of buildings, probably thrown together at different times, with a small wharf leading out into the water. The photograph showed drying towels or swimsuits fluttering in the breeze on a line strung across the wharf. Along the edge of the bluff, at the line of Beach Street was a wooden rail fence to keep bathhouse customers and passerby from falling down the slope.<sup>7</sup>

#### B. Death of William C. Ralston

Black Point Cove and the Neptune Bath House were the setting for tragedy on August 27, 1875, when prominent San Francisco banker, financier and philanthropist, William Chapman Ralston accidentally drowned while swimming in the cove. The death of Ralston, or more precisely, the circumstances surrounding Ralston's demise, have been the subject of much controversy since Ralston had

<sup>4</sup> Deposition of Dennis Mahoney, May 6, 1893. Library, Society of California Pioneers, San Francisco.

<sup>5</sup> City Directory, 1871, page 224.

<sup>6</sup> Alex S. Taylor, "San Francisco Bay Indians." The California Farmer: Journal of Useful Sciences, May 31, 1861, page 106.

<sup>7</sup> Harper's Weekly, September 25, 1875. Volume XIX, Number 978, page 776.

been forced to resign as the president of the Bank of California and relinquish his property to William Sharon on the day of his death. The issue of suicide was raised, and despite the decision by a coroner's jury that the death was accidental, the controversy continues to this day. Ralston was one of the more affluent and influential men in San Francisco, and his rise was directly linked to and corresponded with the rise of San Francisco during and following the gold rush. Ralston is generally credited by historians with creating a strong post-gold rush city. Ralston had helped to organize the Bank of California, "one of the most important financial institutions in the state," and had invested Bank of California assets to develop many pioneer California industries such as water, wool, watches, sugar, and cigars.<sup>8</sup>

Ralston invested in two important industries located at Black Point Cove; the Pioneer Woolen Mills and the Spring Valley Water Company. He had also personally invested in the construction of the Palace Hotel in San Francisco, the California Theatre, and the Union Mill and Mining Company, which was responsible for the early development of Nevada's Comstock Lode of silver. When the Bank of California failed in 1875, Ralston's personal fortunes vanished when he signed them over to the bank and to his friend and creditor William Sharon. Because of his high social stature, his well-known philanthropies in San Francisco, and his important role in the economy of the city, his death and funeral were among the most newsworthy and significant events in post-Civil War San Francisco and California.

After Ralston resigned, he left his office in downtown San Francisco and began a stroll to North Beach, where he was in the habit of swimming in the bay each day. As one historian relates, Ralston arrived at the Neptune Bath House

...after three....He gave Clarence Richards and Jack Dunkley, the proprietors, a genial greeting, flung down a half-dollar for his towels....The proprietor brought the towels, led his patron into the dressing room. As Ralston began to undress, Richards noticed he was perspiring heavily.<sup>9</sup>

Upon changing, Ralston walked out onto the small wharf of the Bath House and dove into the cold waters of the bay. Swimming out some five hundred yards, he passed the wharf of the Selby Smelting Company, where the Selby steamer Bullion was anchored. As Ralston vigorously splashed in the water, the tide slowly began to catch him in its grasp.

<sup>8</sup> Peter R. Decker; Fortunes and Failures: White-Collar Mobility in Nineteenth Century San Francisco. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), page 185. Decker states, unequivocally, that Ralston's death was "an apparent suicide."

<sup>9</sup> Julian Dana; The Man Who Built San Francisco: A Study of Ralston's Journey with Banners. (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1937), page 360.

Meanwhile, on board the Bullion, engineer Martin Clarke, who had been watching Ralston as he swam past the ship, suddenly

noticed a cessation of movement. A moment before the man had been swimming with steady, measured strokes. Now he lay motionless in the water; the tide was floating him down toward the Bullion. In alarm, Clarke loosened the painters on one of the rowboats, started to oar out. In five minutes he reached the swimmer, dragged him aboard with difficulty. Immediately Clarke began to row swiftly towards the nearest shore-line. He beached his boat between Hyde and Leavenworth, pulled the swimmer out on the sand, began to work over him feverishly.<sup>10</sup>

As Clarke hurriedly worked, other men ran up to help. They "worked hard over Billy for nearly an hour, chafing his limbs and applying artificial respiration."<sup>11</sup> But they were too late; a doctor soon arrived and pronounced Ralston dead. News of the death began to circulate, and soon several prominent people, including San Francisco Mayor James Otis, arrived at the scene to watch Ralston's body being taken away. The scene was sad:

...Close by was a half-submerged sloop, while to the north stood the remains of an old wharf with the piles and an occasional stringer standing. The smoke from the lead works had laid its grimy hand over the sands and the bluff and the scene. The voice of the tide was slow, measured, unhurrying. The scarlet of the sunset only made the bleakness stand out....Whispers were low and strained. Tears streamed down women's faces; even men wept openly. One man knelt and cried like a beaten child...<sup>12</sup>

The city began to slowly sink into a state of shock, with rumors of Ralston's "suicide" beginning to circulate by the evening hours. Crowds milled in the streets, and many congregated at the Bank of California, where the men who had presided over Ralston's downfall sat. Everywhere, "at all points the sad event of the day, which has cast a gloom over the city, was the subject of discussion."<sup>13</sup>

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10 Dana; The Man Who Built San Francisco, page 361.

11 David Lavender; Nothing Seemed Impossible: William C. Ralston and San Francisco. (Palo Alto: The American West Publishing Company, 1974), page 379.

12 Dana, page 362.

13 San Francisco Alta California; Memorial of William C. Ralston (San Francisco: Alta Press, 1875), page 6. Collections of the San Francisco Archives, Main Library, San Francisco.

The issue of suicide versus accidental death worried Coroner Swan, who quickly selected a coroner's jury to ascertain the truth. Through the next day, while the crowds milled in the streets, the jury heard testimony and deliberated. Finally, when their decision was announced, it came as a surprise to those who had thought that Ralston had killed himself.

The deceased was WILLIAM C. RALSTON, late of the City and County of San Francisco. His age was 49 years, and he was a native of Ohio. On Friday afternoon, August 27, 1875, MR. RALSTON, according to his habit of bathing there, proceeded to North Beach for the purpose of sea bathing. He used every reasonable and proper precaution to reduce his body temperature before entering the water. He was carried by the flood tide beyond his power to return; and his exertions to regain the shore, added to the shock to his system by contact with the water, while he was overheated, produced congestion of the brain and vital organs. His death was caused primarily by such congestion, and secondarily by drowning. The jury were unanimous of the opinion, and do find that MR. RALSTON'S death was accidental.

Signed: J.B. GARNISS,	R.F. MORROW,
C.L. WELLER,	J.R. KEENE,
H.F. WILLIAMS,	W.H.L. BARNES
A.A. COHEN,	J.C.L. WADSWORTH.

The coroner, after the jury had rendered their report, thanked them for the diligence and care they had exercised in arriving at their verdict. He also stated that he had left nothing undone that would bring out all the facts in the case.<sup>14</sup>

Ralston had suffered either a pulmonary embolism (a stroke), or congestive heart failure, and had then drowned. His funeral was one of the major events of the decade, with thousands of attendees ranging from important dignitaries to many ordinary citizens who recalled his philanthropic nature. Ralston's contributions to the city and the state were not forgotten.

Interestingly enough, a Ralston Memorial was not erected until 1940, when the San Francisco Chronicle noted that a

gift of \$10,000 for the erection of a monument to the memory of the late William C. Ralston, financier, has been accepted by the Board of Supervisors. The Board joined with the Park Commission in accepting the money donated by Major Edward Bowes, noted radio entertainer. The monument, which will be erected by Haig Patigian, is to be installed on the Marina seawall.<sup>15</sup>

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14 Memorial of William C. Ralston, page 6.

15 San Francisco Chronicle, October 29, 1940.

The monument was installed on the Marina Green in San Francisc and was dedicated on September 8, 1941. The monument is located at the marina, overlooking the bay where Ralston met his death.

#### C. Neptune and Mermaid Baths and Others

For reasons unknown, Joseph Dunkely did not own the Neptune Bath House long after Ralston's demise. The 1877 city directory lists the "Neptune Bath House, J.J. Bamber prop. North Beach, foot Larkin."<sup>16</sup> Joseph J. Bamber was a member of a family of teamsters who had formed their own business, Bamber and Company. Joseph, one of three brothers, had also worked independently for Wells Fargo and Company as a teamster. For some unknown reason, perhaps from swimming at Black Point Cove, Bamber had been attracted to the possibility of operating the bathhouse there. Bamber's record of operation of the Neptune Bath House, however, was spotty and may have been plagued by poor finances. The 1877-1878 city directory lists Bamber as the proprietor of the "Mermaid and Neptune Sea Baths," with Joseph Rigney as a partner.<sup>17</sup> But the 1878 directory lists Bamber alone as the proprietor, possibly indicating a short-lived partnership. Then, in 1879-1880, Bamber seems to have divided the establishment in half, for both the Neptune and Mermaid Baths and a new concern, known as the "Sheltered Cove Baths," both run by Bamber, are listed.<sup>18</sup> Bamber's finances must have been poor, for in the 1881-1882 city directory he is listed both as operator of the baths and as a driver for Wells, Fargo, and Company, indicating that his bathhouse business was not faring well. In fact, the same city directory finds his brother William Bamber, who had been working for him as an attendant at the bathhouse, now employed as a "weaver, SF Pioneer Woolen Factory."<sup>19</sup>

Bamber's apparent money problems seem to have made him to sell the Neptune Baths, or at least the one-half of the premises that housed the bathhouse operating under that name. The 1882-1883 directory lists the Neptune and Mermaid Sea Baths as under the ownership of William H. Bovee, and managed by John H. Berg, while Bamber operated the Sheltered Cove Baths.<sup>20</sup> The same year also saw the opening of a new bathing establishment, the Golden Gate Sea Baths which were operated by proprietor Henry Frahm.<sup>21</sup> Frahm's baths apparently

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<sup>16</sup> City Directory, 1877, page 879. The previous year's directory listed Bamber as a teamster with Wells Fargo with a residence at Hyde and Lombard.

<sup>17</sup> City Directory, 1877-1878, page 114.

<sup>18</sup> City Directory, 1879-1880, page 106.

<sup>19</sup> City Directory, 1881-1882, page 126. The directory for 1878 had listed W.D. Bamber as "attendant, Mermaid Baths."

<sup>20</sup> City Directory, 1882-1883, page 723.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, page 181.

prospered, as did the Neptune and Mermaid under Bovee; it would seem that teamstering, and not bathhouses, was Mr. Bamber's forte.

Perhaps in an effort to save a faltering business, Bamber went into partnership with John H. Berg, the manager of Bovee's successful Neptune and Mermaid Baths in 1884-1885. However, the Sheltered Cove Baths had been moved to a new location, at Montgomery and Bay Streets (now the intersection of Columbus and Bay).<sup>22</sup> Bovee may have bought Bamber's interest in the other half of the building at Black Point Cove, and the new capitol enabled Bamber to start anew at a different location. Bamber, however, did not operate his new bathhouse for long, since by 1886 he was no longer listed in the city directory and Berg was cited as the proprietor of Sheltered Cove Baths.<sup>23</sup> Meanwhile a quaint description of the cove in the 1880s would indicate the businesses of Frahm and Bovee were booming:

...San Franciscans by the hundreds swarmed to Black Point Beach to have their Sunday outings and frolic on the sand and floats, the girls in their heavy flannel suits and the bloods of the town in dashing and jaunty outfits which covered them from elbow and knee....The Neptune and Mermaid Swimming Baths, rambling and brightly painted wooden structures, lay back from the beach....<sup>24</sup>

The same description also states that on the beach could be found "as jolly and light-hearted a set of swimming men and women...." However, hard times were in store for the bathhouses and soon there would be no more "jolly and light-hearted" behaviour.

#### D. Decline of the Baths

By the early 1890s, the bathhouses were in serious trouble. The Neptune and Mermaid Baths closed in 1891, Sheltered Cove folded as early as 1887, and Henry Frahm's Golden Gate Sea Baths were the last hold-out, finally closing in 1894. The first indications of trouble appeared in 1887, when the City Directory suddenly listed Frahm as a "fish-curer," with no mention of the Golden Gate Sea Baths, and the Sheltered Cove Baths had also temporarily closed, with Berg listed as a "teacher, swimming."<sup>25</sup> Only the Neptune and Mermaid Baths were in operation, and if reports are accurate, the business had been dealt a blow "from which it never recovered...On Good Friday in 1885...a heavy wind and rain-storm levelled entire sections of the bathhouses."<sup>26</sup> The

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<sup>22</sup> City Directory, 1884-1885, page 221.

<sup>23</sup> City Directory, 1886, page 236.

<sup>24</sup> San Francisco Chronicle, May 1, 1950 "The Waning of Black Point Beach."

<sup>25</sup> City Directory, 1887, page 222.

<sup>26</sup> San Francisco Chronicle, May 1, 1950.

Neptune and Mermaid Baths passed out of Bovee's hands in 1886, when Charles H. Hanson was listed as the new proprietor. The Sheltered Cove Baths were listed for one last time in 1889, with no subsequent mention; this was the last of Mr. Bamber's ill-fated business.<sup>27</sup> Hanson apparently was able to do a good business, for

...it was a bad Sunday for proprietor Charlie Hanson when every one of his 300 bathhouses was not rented all day long to holiday patrons who had walked or driven from the city in carriages with their bathing suits and lunches for a day of salt water and air.<sup>28</sup>

After three years as a "fish-curer," Henry Frahm re-opened the Golden Gate Sea Baths in 1890, outlasting Hanson, who was last mentioned in the 1891 directory.<sup>29</sup> Frahm soon followed him, however, being mentioned for the last time in the 1894 directory.<sup>30</sup>

In 1895, Black Point Cove's bathhouses were abandoned:

The once bright bathhouses were weather-worn and paintless, their doors hung listlessly from broken hinges. They seemed, one reporter noted, to possess "an air of despondent regret over their desertion." "The future," he continued, "does not seem to hold out much promise for the little beach at Black Point as a swimming resort. Its glories are of the past and are fading as the bathhouses are crumbling...The beach is still a good swimming place, but the air of desolation grows thick and with grim ironical assertion."<sup>31</sup>

The reasons for the closure may have simply been the sudden increase of indoor, heated, clean bathing establishments such as the Lurline Baths, the Crystal Baths, and the Sutro Baths. The closure of the bathhouses did not mean the end of swimming at Black Point Cove. Some hardy souls still came there to swim. San Francisco Chronicle reporter Robert O'Brien, who specialized in writing about the old days of the city, noted that

Harry Brook of the City Engineer's Office remembers that as a lad he used to go swimming there in the cove, in the late 1890s.... Something that made the water pleasant, and on the chillier days

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27 City Directory, 1889, page 1183.

28 San Francisco Chronicle, May 1, 1950.

29 City Directory, 1891, page 1036.

30 City Directory, 1894, page 568.

31 San Francisco Chronicle, May 1, 1950.

bearable, was the presence of a large pipe which carried water to the Bay from the Ghiradelli chocolate factory. The factory in those days apparently used a water-cooling system for its machinery, and discharged through this pipe a constant flow of warm water which effectively raised the temperature of the cove for a radius of 20 to 30 yards from the outlet. No matter how icy the water was everywhere else in the Bay, Harry and his friends splashed about this area as comfortably as if they had been in a heated pool.<sup>32</sup>

But there were also swimmers in the cove who would disdain the opportunity for a heated swim. The hardy and rugged members of various swimming and rowing clubs, such as the Ariel Club, the Dolphin Club, and the South End Club had located at and were swimming in Black Point Cove within six years of the closure of Henry Frahm's Golden Gate Baths. Members of the clubs had undoubtedly swam in the cove prior to this time; they would continue to use it for many decades. The rowing and swimming clubs are still located in Black Point Cove, now called Aquatic Park; they were largely responsible for the preservation of the Cove and the development of the Aquatic Park.

#### E. Rowing and Swimming Clubs

By the end of the nineteenth century, three of San Francisco's pioneer swimming and rowing clubs had located along the shores of Black Point Cove to take the place of the now-defunct bathhouses. Members of the three clubs had probably swam in the cove for many years prior to their move as patrons of Henry Frahm or Charlie Hansen. Indeed, many of the club members were working-men, as had been a high proportion of the bathhouse clientele. The more "genteel" elements of society were no doubt patronizing the interior bathing establishments of the Lurline, Crystal, and Sutro Baths.

The rowing and swimming clubs had their origins firmly immersed in the traditions of working class San Francisco. Many of the charter members of the three clubs were either laborers or small business owners. The occupations of two charter members of the rowing clubs, Peter McAvoy and James Bolan, are indicative of this; the San Francisco City Directory for 1873 lists their occupations respectively as "mattress maker" and "coachman."<sup>33</sup> The clubs, or at least one, were also oriented along ethnic lines, with the Dolphin Club having its start as "an exclusive German turnverein with a limited membership of twenty-five men..."<sup>34</sup>

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32 San Francisco Chronicle, May 1, 1950.

33 City Directory, 1873.

34 Brian Gilpin; "The Dolphin Archives." Typescript Manuscript, 1980, page 1. Files of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area. Paper prepared for History 303 class, San Francisco State University.

The significance of these institutions is three-fold; first, they continued a pattern of public recreation for the working class in Black Point Cove; second, they spurred and fought for the creation of Aquatic Park; and third, as historian Brian Gilpin has suggested, the clubs were more than another group of "anomalous San Francisco institution(s)...." Their story serves as a means for assessing cultural change and social change in San Francisco. Gilpin points out that in the case of the Dolphin Club,

Over the years, what was once an exclusive German turnverein with a limited membership of twenty-five men has evolved into a private club, open to all, with a membership as diverse as the population of the city itself. It is no coincidence that through the years the Dolphin Club has experienced the same social forces that have assailed San Francisco. The most obvious results brought about by these forces were changes in the ethnic, class, and sexual composition of the club.<sup>35</sup>

The clubs were originally located in locales other than Black Point Cove. According to one source, the clubs began as "squatters on the muddy shores of China Basin."<sup>36</sup> The Dolphin Club was first located near Black Point Cove. The first clubhouse being at Montgomery and Beach streets--less than two blocks east of Joseph Bamber's Sheltered Cove Baths. However, the changing character of the City's waterfront, brought on by San Francisco's penchant for landfill, eventually forced the clubs to seek other locations.

Recent archaeological research indicates that the area near the first location of the Dolphin Club (and the Sheltered Cove Baths) was in use by 1887-1890 as a dump, primarily for San Francisco's Chinatown.<sup>37</sup> As this household garbage became the basis for landfill, the Dolphin Club was forced to move. In 1890 the club had shifted its location to the foot of Leavenworth Street, and in 1895 had chosen "A protected site at the foot of Van Ness Avenue to try to assure the membership a dependable location out of the path of construction for some years to come" in Black Point Cove.<sup>38</sup> Meanwhile, the other clubs were finding that other locations were also prone to rapid landfill and development, and by the turn of the century had joined the Dolphin Club in Black Point Cove.

The Dolphin Club, learning from experience, built their new club house at Black Point Cove so that it could be easily moved. The completed structure cost the club members \$1,800.<sup>39</sup> The other club-houses, unlike the Dolphin

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35 Gilpin, page 1.

36 San Francisco Examiner and Chronicle, November 23, 1980. page 2.

37 Conversation with Dr. Allen Pastron, ARCHEO-TEC, January 5, 1981.

38 Toogood, Volume 2, page 118.

39 Ibid.

Clubs, were barged to their new locations.<sup>40</sup> Thus, by the early 1900s, three club were nestled together at the foot of Van Ness Avenue, their long finger piers and boat launching ramps reaching out into the waters of Black Point Cove.

The rowing and swimming clubs were the center of much aquatic activity on the bay, with annual swims such as the Golden Gate Swim, the Alcatraz Swim, and others, rowing competitions, and "fun social outings, such as picnics, barbecues, dances, and banquets...."<sup>41</sup> However, the enjoyment of the cove was threatened after 1906 when the city fathers approved the dumping of earthquake debris along the beaches of Black Point Cove. No doubt the despoilation of their supposedly sacrosanct haven sparked the Dolphin and other clubs to formulate the first plans for the eventual preservation of the cove and its protected use as an Aquatic Park. When finally approved and constructed, the Aquatic Park development would bring many changes to the clubs.

The plans for the construction of Aquatic Park, as formulated by the City of San Francisco and constructed by the Works Progress Administration, called for the removal of the rowing clubs from their locations at the foot of Van Ness Avenue. The structures were moved first, on a temporary basis, in June of 1926, when the three buildings were moved to the foot of Polk Street to allow an extension of Van Ness Avenue to the northeast tip of Black Point, where a new recreation pier the city had planned was to be built.

The club houses stayed in their new locations until 1936, when the construction activity for a large bathhouse (now the Maritime Museum building) necessitated their removal again. The old wooden buildings were being moved temporarily since the Aquatic Park plan called for a new, permanent boathouse for the three clubs at the western end of the cove. However, due to a shortage of funds, the projected new structure never was built. Instead, the old buildings were moved to their last and present location at the corner of Hyde and Jefferson streets.

Hope for the new buildings did not die. As late as 1938, with much of the Aquatic Park project completed, the city fathers were promising the clubs that they intended "to erect as soon as funds are available for said purposes a new building or new buildings which will afford accomodations for several boating clubs and similar organizations in Aquatic Park...."<sup>42</sup> As part of the arrangement made between the clubs and the city, the three boathouses were deeded to the city, who then rented them to the clubs for the privilege of remaining in Aquatic Park.

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40 Toogood, Volume 2, page 118.

41 Ibid.

42 Agreement between the Dolphin Club and the City and County of San Francisco, 1938.

While the actual ownership of the club-houses changed, the membership of the clubs also changed. From an early membership of a "predominantly working class first generation immigrant type" the club's internal make-up had been altered after the move to Black Point Cove to a membership of "second generation professionals."<sup>43</sup> Historian Gilpin defines this change as

the formation of a "real club" - a definite fraternal order possessing an enormous amount of solidarity. To Lawton Hughes, the oldest active member of the club, "These were the best years."

However, the new status quo of the clubs was not completely integrated, women being barred from the ranks of the clubs. The various members, rather, were "Tanned and barrel-chested" examples of masculinity.<sup>44</sup>

In the 1960s, however, the forces of change once again settled upon the clubs when agitation to reverse the "male only" policy of the clubs was initiated. The first interchanges were in August 1965, when "Crusty club-members wielded oars when three bare young representatives of the Sexual Freedom League tried to climb a club wharf...."<sup>45</sup> The change was finally brought about in 1977 when San Francisco attorney Sandra Terzian filed suit against the City of San Francisco and the three rowing clubs to end sexual discrimination in club membership policies. Terzian won her suit, and as a result, the Dolphin and the South End Rowing Clubs integrated their membership. When the San Francisco Rowing Club (formerly the Ariel Club) refused to do so, the City cancelled their lease and they were forced to vacate their clubhouse.

Meanwhile, the land surrounding the clubs had been incorporated into the recently created Golden Gate National Recreation Area of the National Park Service. The National Park Service refused to accept the land that the clubs occupied since they were private clubs and it would be contrary to the concept of public parks and public land to allow a private club with facilities closed to public use to occupy the land. The city fathers eventually took the same stance and the clubs, in 1977, opened their doors on a limited basis to the general public for a small use fee.

The hardy rowing clubs survived many long years of development and hardship. Their membership today is strong, with lawyers, doctors, policemen, and other professionals joining the ranks. And, in what must be mortifying to the last of the "crusty club-members" who refused to let women join the clubs, "the women win most of the prizes" in club competitions.

The latest chapter in the story of the rowing clubs was written on November 22, 1980, when a spectacular fire gutted the vacant San Francisco

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43 Gilpin, page 1.

44 San Francisco Examiner and Chronicle, November 23, 1980.

45 San Francisco Examiner and Chronicle, November 23, 1980.

Rowing Club building and caused tremendous damage to the Dolphin Club building. However, with a typical penchant for picking up the pieces and moving ahead, the Dolphins on the next day

put aside this problem...to entertain renowned University of Indiana swim coach James Scullis, who led some of them in a swim from Alcatraz to Pier 39 and then back to the fire-damaged club-house.<sup>46</sup>

As of this writing, repair work on the Dolphin Clubhouse is proceeding. The nearly destroyed San Francisco Rowing Club building was demolished and the San Francisco Parks and Recreation Commission recently approved the construction of an addition to the Dolphin Club's building on the site.

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46 San Francisco Examiner and Chronicle, November 23, 1980.

#### 4. CHANGES TO BLACK POINT COVE, 1858-1938

##### A. Bay Fill

Black Point Cove, like many other portions of the San Francisco waterfront, was subjected to filling activity as the city expanded through the years. While Black Point Cove was not subjected to an extensive filling operation, which was the unfortunate fate of other San Francisco coves, the changes in the configuration of the cove were drastic and very noticeable.<sup>1</sup> It should also be noted that the fill medium, while possessing archaeological significance, is probably not as complex and colorful as the fill components of the downtown area, where dead animals, garbage, unsold merchandise, and even complete ships were mixed with sand, dirt and rock to make "solid ground."

The first filling operations in Black Point Cove appear to have commenced in or around 1858-1860, when the San Francisco Water Company and the San Francisco Woolen Factory (Pioneer Woolen Mills) located on the southwestern shore. The earliest known photograph of the cove, which was taken sometime prior to October 1861, shows a wooden bulkhead on the shoreline near the two structures with fill packed behind it, probably for use as a wharf or landing. The 1859 Coast Survey Chart shows structures below the high tide mark in this area. An 1867 map shows that extensive filling had taken place, with squared, filled bulkheads and wharves pushing out some twenty or more feet beyond the original shoreline.<sup>2</sup>

An 1868 map carefully delineated the contours of the cove and showed some minor additions to the central bulkhead.<sup>3</sup> Doubtless the land along the shoreline was being filled for the construction of buildings since the steep beach afforded little space as the Selby Smelting and Lead Company works on the eastern shore of the cove appear to have filled some of the land around their smelters for building space. This fill was relatively minor; later, more extensive filling operations to destroy the original contours and the beach of Black Point Cove.

After the disastrous earthquake and fire of April 1906, San Francisco city officials, anxious to remove rubble from the devastated urban core, began hauling debris to selected dumping sites such as Black Point, where "the beautiful white sand beach of the cove became the dumping grounds for tons of

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<sup>1</sup> There are many references to San Francisco's penchant for filling San Francisco Bay. Among the best is Gerald Robert Dow's "Bay Fill in San Francisco: A History of Change." Unpublished M.A. Thesis, San Francisco State University, 1973.

<sup>2</sup> "Map of Point San Jose or Black Point, November 5, 1867" Drawer 96, Sheet 8, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

<sup>3</sup> "Map of Point San Jose, San Francisco Harbor...1868" Drawer 90, Sheet 4, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

debris from the Palace Hotel and other destroyed downtown buildings.<sup>4</sup> The earthquake debris may have amounted to some 15,000 truck loads of mostly red brick rubble. Fortunately, a comparison of a 1904 map of the cove with a 1909 map shows the western edge of the cove had not been greatly altered; it would take another filling project to alter the natural contour of that area.

In 1913, military officials busy constructing a connection between Fort Mason's McDowell Road and Van Ness Avenue filled in along the high tide mark on the western shore, built a seawall, and then backfilled to create a narrow macadamized road. The result was an addition of some thirty or more feet of dry land on the western edge of Black Point.<sup>5</sup>

The extension, at the same time, of the Belt Line Railroad system across Black Point lagoon also added more dry land to the cove as excavated material from the railroad tunnel being driven through Black Point was dumped along the railroad trestle and along the seawall. Water lots in the vicinity of today's Victorian Park were completely filled by this process and an application to fill the rest of the cove was filed with the city in 1914.<sup>6</sup> Fortunately, the military learned of efforts to preserve the cove and had ceased their filling operations in 1914.

One final filling operation was to take place in 1930-1931 when Van Ness Avenue was extended to the end of Black Point to meet the recently constructed Municipal Pier. A new seawall was built a few yards east of the 1912 military seawall, the space between the two walls was filled, and Van Ness Avenue was graded and paved. This, however, will be discussed in detail later.

#### B. Military Wharves and Piers

The first wharf, or pier, to be constructed in Black Point Cove was a small military pier with a boathouse on the end known as the "General's Pier." This structure appeared in the 1867 and the 1868 maps of the area, and was located approximately where the present railroad tunnel portal is, which would put the boathouse site approximately where the west restroom/concession stand is.

The pier may have been built as early as 1863, when the post was first garrisoned by the military. The wharf was reached by a road that led down the east flanks of Black Point, from the Commanding General's quarters, and it was from here that "guests to the post from San Francisco often arrived and

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<sup>4</sup> Toogood, Civil History of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area...  
Volume 2, page 122.

<sup>5</sup> Map "Fort Mason, California, 1917" Collection of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area, San Francisco.

<sup>6</sup> Toogood, Civil History...Volume 2, pages 124-125.

departed by boat."<sup>7</sup> It was apparently easier to visit the post by boat in those days than walk over the sand dunes of North Beach.

The wharf was described in an 1870 report by the Post Quartermaster. The road and the boathouse were supposedly "unstable," and the boathouse required new pilings.<sup>8</sup> In 1877, repairs had evidently taken place or a new wharf had been built. That year the San Francisco Alta California reported that

Officers of foreign fleets can have their boats brought to the wharf at the foot of the reservation whence they ascend by a romantic winding path to the (Commanding General's) house forms the centre of a lovely picture.<sup>9</sup>

The wharf described was probably a new Quartermaster's Wharf at the northeast edge of the post at the site of the present day Municipal Pier, with the "romantic winding path" being McDowell Avenue, which was graded in 1877. The old General's Pier wharf was apparently still in place in 1888, when a description of the post noted it as Building 21, with dimensions of "20 by 40 feet... condition...fair."<sup>10</sup> The structure must have disappeared soon after than, for it is not shown on the 1892 map of the post.<sup>11</sup> Whether it was removed or simply allowed to deteriorate is not known.

The second military wharf to be built in Black Point Cove was actually constructed at the northwest edge of the cove at the tip of Black Point. This wharf, known as the "Quartermaster's Wharf," was built around 1871 and may be the structure referred to in the Alta California in July of 1877 as a place where visiting boats could be moored. The wharf is shown in the 1871 map of the post at the northeast corner.<sup>12</sup> This is the first notation of this structure, which does not appear in the 1867 or 1868 maps. Apparently the wharf was constructed before McDowell Road, which ran down along the cliff from upper Fort Mason.

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7 Report of Lieutenant C.O. Howard, November 5, 1870 to the Quartermaster General. Files of the Office of the Quartermaster General, Record Group 92, National Archives; as quoted in Thompson, Historic Resource Study, Fort Mason, page 24.

8 Ibid.

9 San Francisco Daily Alta California, July 7, 1877, as quoted in Thompson, Historic Resource Study, page 27.

10 Thompson, Historic Resource Study, page 56.

11 "Map of the Fort Mason Military Reservation...1892" National Park Service, Golden Gate National Recreation Area Files, Fort Mason.

12 "Military Reserve, Point San Jose, California, 1871" National Park Service, Golden Gate National Recreation Area Files.

The wharf and the road were described in 1884 by the Alta California:

At the northeast corner of the base is Government wharf, where the McPherson makes regular landings, and from which finely gravelled roads wind to the officers' quarters above. the residences of the officers are on the eastern slope....<sup>13</sup>

The same wharf must have been the landing spot, on September 11, 1880, of President Rutherford B. Hayes, who came by means of the Army steamer General McPherson. Other dignitaries were landed at the wharf through the years, including former President Ulysses Grant, who visited in 1879.

The wharf was repaired and enlarged in 1889, when "the Quartermaster General authorized \$16,700....This project provided for the replacement of the teredo-eaten wooden piles with ones of iron.<sup>14</sup> In addition to the wharf work, a stone seawall and bulkhead were built along the shore near the wharf at the foot of McDowell Avenue. This wall, which was added to in 1912, was subject to intensive wave action and repairs were needed in 1894.<sup>15</sup> The wharf was extensively used, both as a landing spot for visitors and guests, and as the landing spot when military prisoners were taken from Alcatraz for work at Fort Mason. Occasionally supplies were shipped to the island prison from this wharf, but is likely that much of the materials shipped to Alcatraz were sent from the Army Quartermaster's wharf at the foot of Folsom Street in downtown San Francisco. But how infrequent the use, this wharf can correctly be termed the first "Alcatraz Pier" on the mainland.

The wharf's location was ideal for the construction of the city's proposed Municipal Pier in 1930. The army agreed to allow the city to build the pier and demolish the old military wharf, provided that the city would supply the Army with a new structure.

In June of 1930, the city "awarded a contract with M.B. McGowan, lowest bidder at \$30,257, to do the work...One year later, on June 22, 1931, the Board of Supervisors, Resolution No. 34579, presented the newly-constructed Army Transport Service wharf to the United States with the understanding that the city had a permit to build its recreation pier...."<sup>16</sup>

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13 San Francisco Daily Alta California, July 30, 1884. As quoted in Thompson, Historic Resource Study, Fort Mason, page 42.

14 Thompson, Historic Resource Study, Fort Mason, page 57, n. 34.

15 Ibid.

16 Anna Coxe Toogood, Historic Resource Study, The Bay Area Community: A Civil History of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area... (Denver: National Park Service, 1980) Volume 2, page 136, n. 126.

The new wharf, Fort Mason Pier Four, which is located on the shore of Black Point directly to the east of the Municipal Pier, was utilized by the army and, after 1934 by the Federal Bureau of Prisons, when Alcatraz Federal Penitentiary opened. Many prisoners were transported to and from the "Rock" from this pier, as well as the guards and their families. This pier, where the Alcatraz boat Warden Johnston docked, was the island's only tie to the mainland. In 1972, when the Golden Gate National Recreation Area was established, the wharf became part of the park as part of Fort Mason.

### C. State Belt Railroad of California

As will be seen in a later chapter, the construction of the Belt Line Railroad trestle across Black Point Cove and the filling activities that took place in conjunction with the construction served as the impetus for serious lobbying for the preservation of the cove and the creation of an Aquatic Park. Plans for the belt line railroad extension through the cove were first advanced in 1912, when officials planning the Panama Pacific International Exposition for 1915 asked the Board of Harbor Commissioners for permission. The military had previously been approached in 1906, when the Southern Pacific Railroad had requested

...permission to build a single-track railroad tunnel under Fort Mason, running east-west, and having a spur from the western boundary....The army engineers said that such a tunnel would not interfere with Battery Barnham....Quartermaster Devol recommended that the tunnel be built as it would expedite the processing of supplies for the overseas stations....The War Department...directed General Funston...to inform Southern Pacific that no further action would be taken until the company itself secured congressional authority to construct the tunnel....<sup>17</sup>

In addition, the proposed extension of the railroad would also aid the Army's new transport wharves and warehouses recently constructed on the northwest corner of the Fort Mason military reservation. These new facilities would serve the military well, being the instrument by which thousands of men, materials, and supplies were shipped to overseas campaigns. The railroad would expedite the shipping of supplies for the Fort Mason piers; this point was doubtless stressed to the military officials, and this permanent benefit to the area west of Black Point probably aided the cause of the railroad extension greatly. Thus the military was pre-disposed to allow the construction of a tunnel beneath Black Point for railroad trackage to pass through.

Congressional approval for the tunnel beneath Black Point was granted on January 8, 1909, when an Act of Congress designated a right-of-way across Fort Mason for the Southern Pacific Railroad.<sup>18</sup> For some reason, Southern Pacific

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17 Thompson, Historic Resource Study, Fort Mason, pages 78-79.

18 Erwin N. Thompson, "A Brief History of the Construction of the Railroad Tunnel at Fort Mason, 1906-14" Handwritten Manuscript, National Park Service, Denver, Colorado, page 4.

officials were slow to act, and military officials, desiring the benefits of a tunnel, began to recommend that the government undertake the costs of excavating a tunnel, noting

Upkeep and repairs to the tunnel would be almost nothing. Cars could be delivered at all times via a tunnel, whereas fog would delay or suspend ferry operations. The cost of delivering a car to the depot through the tunnel would be less than half than by ferry. Part of the cost of the tunnel would be returned to the United States by tolls collected for the use of the tunnel from commercial interests to the west of Fort Mason.<sup>19</sup>

However, recent developments were to provide the military with a tunnel at no cost to the government. A citizen's group preparing for the gigantic Panama Pacific International Exposition, which was to be held on filled tidelands to the west of Fort Mason, projected that the proposed tunnel beneath Fort Mason was vital to the development of the exposition grounds. Without a tunnel, the "exposition grounds and the 1 1/4 miles of potential dock sites at Harbor View, which comprised one-seventh of San Francisco's waterfront, were without a railroad."<sup>20</sup>

It would be the Exposition backers who would finally succeed in placing a tunnel beneath Fort Mason. In 1912, the Exposition group petitioned the Board of Harbor Commissioners for approval for an elevated railroad trestle across Black Point Cove, while in Washington, Congressman Julius Kahn introduced new legislation to allow the Exposition group to construct a tunnel beneath Fort Mason. Approval was granted on June 28, 1912, granting "a right of way to the Panama Pacific International Exposition Company....This Act also repealed the Act that had granted the Southern Pacific Company a right of way...."<sup>21</sup> One year later, the State Board of Harbor Commissioners assented to the construction of the tunnel and the elevated railroad trestle across the cove, with the understanding that the Exposition company would transfer their right to the tunnel to the Board, who would use the tunnel for the harbor's waterfront rail system, the State Belt Railroad. The transfer of the rights to the use of the tunnel were approved by the government, and "after the tunnel costs were paid, the tunnel was to become the property of the United States, subject to use by the State Harbor Commission so long as it lived up to established regulations."<sup>22</sup>

Construction of the tunnel began in early 1914; the trestle across the cove had been completed just a short time before. The trestle cut across the

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<sup>19</sup> As quoted in Thompson, "A Brief History...", pages 6-7.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, page 9.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, page 11.

recently filled southern shore of the cove, and crossed the water beginning at the end of Polk Street, stopping at the as yet unfinished west end of the tunnel. Excavations through the rock and clay of Black Point took but a few months, with much of the excavated material being dumped in the cove alongside the completed trestle.<sup>23</sup> The project was completed in late 1914. The November 1, 1914, San Francisco Chronicle mentioned that the "last spike" in the project had been driven at the west portal of the tunnel.<sup>24</sup> The tunnel was open, initiating some fifty years of rail service across the lands that would become Aquatic Park.

In addition to serving as the rail line for supplies and equipment needed at the Panama Pacific International Exposition, the extension of the State Belt Railroad across Black Point Cove and through the point also served "other industries, along the line of this Jefferson Street extension...and by this means a large new waterfront area of desirable flat land has been made more available for factory and other commercial uses."<sup>25</sup> The extension and the tunnel had completed a continuous belt line along the waterfront of San Francisco. This finished a system that had been begun in the 1880s to move large amounts of cargo to and from ships docked along the waterfront. Construction had begun in 1889, when "501 tons of 60-pound steel rails, and the requisite fashionings..." were shipped to San Francisco.<sup>26</sup> With the new extension in 1914,

...a continuous belt railroad switching system, adequately equipped, is now in full and successful operation around the whole active harbor front of San Francisco, from the United States transport docks on the north and west to Channel street on the south. It is a tremendous gain to the harbor, and its real advantages only become properly estimated when it is recollected that even such a great seaport as New York has no harbor belt line.<sup>27</sup>

The system continued to grow, notably in 1914 when the trackage was extended from Laguna Street to the Presidio of San Francisco, and in later years when additional tracks were laid south of town along the San Francisco peninsula.

The trestle across Black Point Cove was slated for removal after 1924, when the long-delayed construction of Aquatic Park began. Plans called for the removal of the trestle to a more southerly alignment, restoring the pre-1914

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23 Toogood, Historic Resource Study...Volume 2, page 128.

24 Thompson, "A Brief History...", page 13.

25 Report of the Board of State Harbor Commissioners, 1914, page 20. San Francisco Public Library.

26 Ibid, 1892, page 19.

27 Ibid, 1914, page 20.

shoreline. While the annual reports of the State Harbor Commissioner do not mention the minor change in alignment, construction photographs of Aquatic Park taken after 1925 show that the trestle had been partially dismantled and that the tracks had been relaid behind the new seawall being constructed on the present alignment of the railroad.<sup>28</sup> Apparently the old pilings from the trestle, which can be seen as late as 1936 in some photographs along the shore of the new cove, were removed by 1938-1939, when the project was completed by the Works Progress Administration.

The tracks in their new alignment on dry land through Aquatic Park were continually used by the belt line railroad well into the 1960s. The belt line system had declined, however, due to the decline of San Francisco as a major port, the introduction of containerized cargoes, and the increase in trucking. After 1970, the belt line system became more or less defunct. Plans have been advanced for the preservation of the tracks and their ultimate utilization in a waterfront transportation system. Writing in 1977, waterfront historians Roger and Nancy Olmsted commented:

...This unique communication link between BART, the ferry boats to Marin, and public transportation for the downtown section of San Francisco can be utilized in the future for transporting people rather than freight--thus recognizing the change in the north waterfront as it has become a major tourist attraction with its glowing museum complex and the Ghiradelli and Cannery recreational attractions.<sup>29</sup>

While no definite commitments have been made by either the City and County of San Francisco or the National Park Service, the concept advanced by the Olmsteds and others has received much consideration and may be a future example of historic preservation and the adaptive use of historical structures in the Aquatic Park area.

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28 Notebook of original construction photographs for Aquatic Park, Photographic Archives, National Maritime Museum at San Francisco. Hereafter referred to as Aquatic Park Notebook.

29 Roger Olmsted, Nancy Olmsted, Allen Pastron; San Francisco Waterfront: Report on Historical Cultural Resources. (San Francisco: Wastewater Management Program, 1977), pages 555-556.

## 5. BIRTH OF AQUATIC PARK, 1866-1930

### A. Early Plans for an Aquatic Park at Black Point, 1866-1905

While much of the emphasis for the planning and construction of an Aquatic Park in San Francisco dates to the period just after 1906, when the future of Black Point Cove was threatened by indiscriminate dumping and landfill, the first thoughts for the preservation and utilization of Black Point Cove preceded the ultimately successful effort by some forty years. As early as 1866, pioneer landscape architect and planner Frederick Law Olmsted was proposing the use of Black Point Cove for a waterfront park. In a report to the city fathers, Olmsted outlined a preliminary plan for the construction of a public pleasure ground. Many of the points emphasized by Olmsted in support of the plan, such as the lack of recreational spaces or monuments to instill a sense of civic pride and patriotism, would be cited thirty-nine years later by Daniel Hudson Burnham in his plan for the redesign of San Francisco. Olmsted insisted that San Francisco have a proper landing spot for dignitaries and foreign representatives, and the best locale for this "municipal landing place and marine parade" was

suitable to the commercial position of the city and to the duties which it will be proper for it to assume as holding the portal of the republic on the Pacific, where foreign dignitaries and our own national representatives will land and embark, and a port of refuge to which men-of-war of all nations may at any moment be obliged to resort, there seems to be a suitable place on the east side of the ridge of Point San Jose, between the fort and the Pioneer Woolen Mills. It enjoys considerable protection from the sea wind, as is shown by the growth of shrubs, and there is a good depth of water immediately off shore, with good anchorage.<sup>1</sup>

Olmsted went on to cite what he thought should be developed in Black Point lagoon:

Here there should be a suitable landing quay and a plaza, with a close and thick plantation of evergreens on the west side, with banks of shrubs and flowers. The plaza or parade should be open and large enough to be used for a drill ground by a battery of artillery or a regiment of infantry, with some standing room and seats for spectators. It should also contain an elegant pavilion for the accommodation of committees of reception and their guests and a band of music, and should be decorated with flagstaffs, marine trophies, and eventually with monuments to naval heroes, discoverers and explorers. It should not, however, be very large or fitted for extended ceremonies, being considered rather as the sea-gate of the city than the place of entertainment for its guests.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Frederick Law Olmsted et als.; Preliminary Report In Regard to a Plan of Public Pleasure Grounds for the City of San Francisco. (New York: William C. Bryant & Company for Olmsted, Vaux & Company, 1866), page 22.

<sup>2</sup> Olmsted, page 22.

The Olmsted plan was destined never to achieve fruition, no doubt due to already firmly entrenched businesses on the shore of Black Point Cove and the occupation and use of Black Point by the military.

The failure of the Olmsted plan, however, did nothing to discourage a more grandiose scheme for the city thirty-nine years later. In 1905, noted landscape architect Daniel Hudson Burnham proposed a major plan for the City of San Francisco. Burnham's credentials were indeed impressive; since

...Burnham had established himself as the most prestigious city planner in America. He had already served as chief of construction for the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893, as head of the commission for the Washington plan for 1901 to 1902, and as chairman of the Cleveland planning commission of 1902 to 1903.<sup>3</sup>

Burnham, the chief advocate in the United States for the so-called "City Beautiful movement," or the imperial school of urban design, had been invited to prepare a plan for the redesign of San Francisco by a group of local citizens headed by James Duval Phelan, former Mayor of San Francisco and later United States Senator from California. The group was known as The Association for the Improvement and Adornment of San Francisco (AIASF).<sup>4</sup> While they may have been partially motivated by a desire for a better designed, more beautiful city, at least one historian had suggested that they were also motivated by a need to utilize urban planning as an impetus for political change in a city ruled by fighting factions of labor and capitol, presided over by ruthless and powerful "bosses."<sup>5</sup> In addition, the change in the general American consciousness after the Spanish-American War, when the United States suddenly gained an overseas empire, may have fostered imperialistic feelings best expressed in the architecture and urban planning proposed by Burnham. San Francisco, as the pacific port for the American empire, was a likely spot for architecture and urban design expressing those feelings.

Burnham's comprehensive plan for the city emphasized the benefits of a new design for the populace. Like Olmsted, Burnham saw the new design as a way of instilling a sense of civic pride and patriotism; drawing comparisons between the city beautiful and classical architecture, Burnham noted "What an uplift the Greek must have felt as he approached the acropolis! and how the pride of the citizenship must have stirred...."<sup>6</sup> Also, like Olmsted, Burnham proposed

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<sup>3</sup> Judd Kahn, Imperial San Francisco: Politics and Planning in an American City, 1897-1906. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1979), page 80.

<sup>4</sup> Kahn, Imperial San Francisco...page 82.

<sup>5</sup> See Kahn's introduction to Imperial San Francisco, pages 1-3.

<sup>6</sup> Daniel H. Burnham, Report on a Plan for San Francisco...Presented to the Mayor and Board of Supervisors by the Association for the Improvement and Adornment of San Francisco, page 167. (San Francisco: Sunset Press, 1905)

the use of statues and monuments. However, unlike Olmsted, for the Black Point Cove area, Burnham proposed a much more restrained plan for an aquatic park. Rather than the massive redevelopment of the area as a ceremonial "seagate" for the city, Burnham saw the city's responsibility as acquiring the area

...for a bay shore park adjacent to the Outer Boulevard, the land bounded by Lewis and Laguna Streets and Fort Mason; also that strip of land encircling the Government Reservation to the east and inclosing the proposed yacht harbor. By doing so it would be enabled to preserve the beauty of the point and to restrain the encroachment of any buildings other than club-houses and those of a semi-public character.<sup>7</sup>

Thus, like Olmsted, who wanted a major change in the character of the area, Burnham saw an aquatic park in Black Point Cove as a necessity to protect the character and recreational use of the cove, hence his reference to "club-houses," which obviously referred to the existing rowing and swimming clubs at the foot of Van Ness Avenue. The only major change in the area would be in the development of the marshy lands west of Black Point as a yacht harbor.

Unfortunately, the Burnham plan was not adopted by the city, even when the perfect opportunity for its implementation surfaced after the almost complete destruction of a major part of San Francisco after the cataclysmic earthquake and fire of April 1906. In fact, some may have even felt relief, since the old city was poorly laid out and the widespread destruction paved the way for a new and better plan...and Burnham's plan was available. However, the city chose to rebuild along the old lines as established commercial patterns dictated the lines of growth.

Instead, Black Point Cove became the dumping ground for tons of earthquake debris and rubble, completely ruining the beauty and much of the use of the beach for recreational purposes. And subsequent filling operations for the military road and the state belt railroad trestle only worsened the situation. It would take serious lobbying and years of struggle for the Black Point Cove area to be preserved for the uses Daniel Burnham had recognized. As for Burnham's plan, very little of it was actually utilized. But, as one historian has noted, several features of the modern city are direct results of the Burnham plan: Civic Center, Park-Presidio Avenue, the widening of certain streets, the marina yacht harbor, and of course, Aquatic Park.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Burnham, Report on a Plan for San Francisco...Presented to the Mayor and Board of Supervisors by the Association for the Improvement and Adornment of San Francisco, page 146. (San Francisco: Sunset Press, 1905)

<sup>8</sup> Charles A. Fracchia, "The City As It Might Have Been." California Living, San Francisco Examiner and Chronicle, Sunday, February 24, 1980, page 27.

## B. Lobbying for an Aquatic Park at Black Point Cove, 1906-1917

Even prior to the preparation of the Burnham plan, sentiment for an Aquatic Park existed, even if only with the special interests who used the cove for recreation, such as the rowing and swimming clubs. The presentation of the Burnham plan, with its promise of preserving the cove, and the initial acceptance of the Burnham plan by the city must have encouraged their preservation interests. However, it was soon apparent that preservation of the cove was not a high priority with the city fathers, who, in the aftermath of the earthquake and fire in April of 1906, dumped thousands of tons of debris on the beach of Black Point Cove, almost effectively ruining it for recreational use.

It is not surprising, then, that the drive for San Francisco to set aside Black Point Cove as an officially designated "aquatic park" began with the rowing and swimming clubs. It is not known when the idea of saving the cove by advocating a public park, but it must have occurred soon after the debris dumping. According to one historian, Dolphin Club member Charles Farrell "originated the proposal for a San Francisco aquatic park."<sup>9</sup> Probably led by Farrell and other adherents of Black Point Cove, an Aquatic Improvement Association was organized. It actively began to lobby with the city fathers, and

submitted a cost estimate for the park in April 1909, along with a request to the Board of Supervisors that the proposition be incorporated into a bond issue...the bond issue came to vote in November 1909, but San Francisco's public rejected the proposal to allocate \$796,000 to acquire lands at the north end of Van Ness Avenue for a public aquatic park.<sup>10</sup>

The initial defeat however, did not deaden the enthusiasm of the aquatic park proponents. In 1912, a new proposal surfaced and was again put to the public vote as Proposition Three. The Board of Supervisors supported the concept of the park, also approving for placement on the ballot a proposition that the city acquire for recreational purposes several hundreds of acres of land on the city's Pacific shore from the estate of Adolph Sutro. The public was apparently more receptive this time around, since the majority voted in favor of acquisition of the land for an aquatic park. Unfortunately, "the two-thirds majority required to secure the issue was not received...."<sup>11</sup> This did not daunt the aquatic park proponents, though, for now they at least had the majority of public support behind their idea.

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<sup>9</sup> Toogood, Volume II, page 122.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. See n. 116.

<sup>11</sup> Toogood, Volume II, page 123. Also see the Journal of Proceedings, Board of Supervisors, City and County of San Francisco, for Thursday, Oct. 13, 1912, page 950.

A new tactic was tried when members of the South End Rowing Club at the foot of Van Ness began to negotiate for a transfer of desirable city lands on the southern waterfront to the Southern Pacific Company, who had purchased some of the acreage of the defunct Pioneer Woolen Mills before the turn of the century and was now proposing to build a railroad across the lagoon by means of a tunnel through Black Point and also "construct several piers in the Black Point Cove for its subsidiary, Pacific Mail Steamship Company."<sup>12</sup> However, the threatened developments were tabled when the Southern Pacific Company did not build their tunnel through Black Point and a new permit was issued to the backers of the Panama Pacific International Exposition, who did build, as mentioned earlier, a railroad trestle across the cove and bored a tunnel through the point.

The changes to Black Point Cove introduced by the railroad trestle and the subsequent land filling along the trestle alignment and the east end of the cove brought the ire of the San Francisco Recreation League, who "spearheaded the fight to protect the cove" from that time. Leading a group of organizations opposed to the land fill at the cove, the Recreation League and their allies were successful in stopping all fill activities by the military and in getting the support of United States Congressman from San Francisco Julius A. Kahn. The support of at least one of the city supervisors was also gained, for on March 3, 1914, Supervisor McLeran introduced a resolution for the "preservation of site of proposed aquatic park." Arguing that the cove was a navigable water and that the filling was illegal under federal and state law, the proposed resolution also stated that

Other than the premises above described, there is no place on the shore line of San Francisco suitable for an aquatic park or for fishing, swimming, or boating...and Whereas, by Section 2524a of the Political Code of the State of California the Harbor Commissioners are authorized to select, set apart, and assign any property under their control...for the purpose of developing and developing aquatic sport...and Whereas the success of the present attempt to fill in the waters be an acknowledgement...said premises will be totally unfitted for fishing, navigation, swimming, and other aquatic sports...Therefore, be it Resolved By the Board of Supervisors that we invite the cooperation of the citizens of San Francisco who are interested in the moral and physical welfare of the citizens of the State of California in the creation of a sentiment that will arrest this march of commercialism and attempted theft of public rights ....<sup>13</sup>

McLeran also asked that legal action be taken against the parties filling the cove. His citation of commercialism versus the public good, in this case for

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<sup>12</sup> Toogood, Volume II, page 123.

<sup>13</sup> Journal of Proceedings, Board of Supervisors, City and County of San Francisco, March 3, 1914, pages 286-287.

recreational enjoyment, is interesting since the Burnham plan, which proposed the preservation of Black Point Cove, had been tabled indefinitely while the city continued to develop along previously determined commercial patterns of growth.

The support the aquatic park proponents were receiving began to help. The filling operations in the cove were stopped, by the end of 1915, but the damage to the cove was tremendous; the formerly beautiful sand beach was gone, covered with tons of rubble, mud, and rock, and much of the former cove was now dry land, while the unsightly railroad trestle cut across the cove and fill along it threatened to cut off access to the water from the various rowers and swimmers. But hope for a change was engendered in April of 1915, when Supervisor Deasey proposed that the city look into the previously proposed transfer of lands between the Southern Pacific Company and the City.<sup>14</sup> In September of the same year, the city attorney approved the transfer. Plans were moving ahead but the transfer was delayed, and in

January 1916, after a comprehensive and detailed assessment of the lands had been completed by the city, the San Francisco recreation league renewed its efforts to gain public support for the project.<sup>15</sup>

The San Francisco Examiner reported that "the San Francisco Recreation League will inaugurate a campaign for the preservation of Black Point Cove as an Aquatic Park," adding

The aquatic section of the Recreation League held a meeting last night and decided to do everything possible to secure favorable action by the Board of Supervisors on the proposition of exchanging the land now owned by San Francisco and rented by the Southern Pacific Railroad for the land owned by the railroad on Black Point Cove. It was also decided to carry on an aggressive campaign with the view of enlisting the aid of other civic bodies. A committee of organization...was appointed....<sup>16</sup>

Hearings on the proposed transfer of lands followed, with some opposition developing when some citizens pointed out that "we already have an aquatic park fronting on the Marina and that this would be a duplication." Others protested that the development of an aquatic park would hamper the commercial development of the area since "Van Ness Avenue would be another Market Street, another commercial artery of San Francisco....That location will be required for ferries in the future when the people of San Francisco may be taken for

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<sup>14</sup> Journal of Proceedings, Board of Supervisors, April 19, 1915, pages 448-449.

<sup>15</sup> Toogood, Volume II, page 126.

<sup>16</sup> San Francisco Examiner, January 8, 1916.

recreation and pleasure to the attractive places in Marin County.<sup>17</sup> Edward Scully, a member of the South End Rowing Club and a strong proponent of the park, spoke in favor of the transfer, noting "the large number of people who leave this city every Sunday and patronize the baths in Alameda County, and urged the aquatic park as a public watering place that will keep San Franciscans in this city."<sup>18</sup> Again, commercialism and the "public good" were being pitted against each other in the aquatic park issue.

The city, still apparently in favor of the transfer, appointed as their appraiser of the lands City Architect William A. Mooser, a man who in the future would have a much greater role to play in the Aquatic Park saga. Meanwhile, the support being sought by the Recreation League was being found. On January 4, 1917, the Board of Supervisors received letters of support for the land transfer from:

Major General J. Franklin Bell, Commanding General, Department of the Pacific, League of Improvement Clubs, Congress of Mothers, Indoor Yacht Club, North Beach Promotion Association, San Francisco Association for the Prevention of Tuberculosis, Polk and Larkin Street District Association, Juvenile Protective Association, Laguna Honda Mothers' and Teacher's Club, Columbus School Mothers' Club, Olympic Club.<sup>19</sup>

With popular support mounting, the Board of Supervisors finally approved the transfer of lands in mid-1917. In November, the city reported that the land transfer had been consummated, with the city receiving some \$392,073.30 from the Southern Pacific Railroad as compensation for the lesser-valued Black Point Cove land. Various proposals for the use of the money by the city were advanced, such as \$300,000 or \$92,000 for the developing of the Black Point Cove area for an aquatic park.<sup>20</sup> No conclusions were reached, however, and the matter was tabled.

In December of 1917, the Board of Supervisors also committed the city to acquisition of additional lands in the Black Point Cove area for an Aquatic Park.<sup>21</sup> Slowly, then, additional lands would be acquired for the park. The struggle to preserve the Black Point Cove area for recreation use had been successful; the city was committed to the project and public support was apparently behind the reclamation and development of the cove for aquatic

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17 Journal of Proceedings, Board of Supervisors, May 15, 1916, page 475.

18 Ibid.

19 Ibid, January 4, 1917, page 17.

20 Journal of Proceedings, Board of Supervisors, November 19, 1917, pages 1385-1386.

21 Ibid, December 3, 1917, page 1439.

sports. What lay ahead, however, was another long battle to actualize the plans and develop the park--it would take ten years.

### C. Acquisition Continues, Early Plans Formulated, 1917-1928

The commitment had been made for an aquatic park at Black Point Cove; the hard task ahead was to procure all of the necessary lands and plan for their development. Much like the battle to preserve the cove, the fight for the development of the park would take many years, with final city approval for construction and reclamation to be a temporary and inadequate measure. The final development of Aquatic Park would be under federal sponsorship under the auspices of the Works Progress Administration.

Following the transfer of lands between the city and the Southern Pacific Railroad, the city had committed itself to future land acquisition in the cove for the park. Acquisition through condemnation of various cove shoreline properties continued into 1917-1924, while the city planned for the park's development. The first plan, a preliminary study of the proposed park, was presented to the public in 1920. Prepared by civil engineer John Punnett of San Francisco, the plan was to serve as the basis for a more detailed plan to be prepared by architects and engineers in an open competition.<sup>22</sup> Interestingly enough, as historian Toogood points out,

Punnett's basic plan for Aquatic Park, dated January 1920, showed the general lines of later development, while the architectural schemes which won first prize in the contest had little resemblance to the later plans selected for the park.<sup>23</sup>

Meanwhile, limited development of the park lands had begun. In August of 1920, the city had contracted to grade the park lands between Larkin and Van Ness for \$25,000 with the San Francisco Motor Drayage Company.<sup>24</sup> In addition, the railroad trestle, which had precipitated the almost complete destruction of the cove, was slated for removal to the shoreline. A contract was let with Healy-Tibbets Construction Company; they would relocate the tracks for \$18,000.<sup>25</sup>

By 1922, the City Engineer could report that

The reconstruction of the State Belt Line railway trestle, removing it inshore from its previous location and the spreading of ballast and ties for the new route of the railway around the curve of

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<sup>22</sup> Toogood, Volume 2, page 129.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, page 130.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, page 130, n. 121.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

Aquatic Park has been completed under contract. The State Harbor Commission, under agreement with this office, has laid and ballasted the track over the new line and has removed the offshore trestle on the old route of the railroad.<sup>26</sup>

The Engineer also noted after the trestle was relocated and the area between Van Ness and Larkin was graded, jurisdiction of the park passed from the Board of Supervisors to the city's Park Commission. The Board of Supervisors received reports on the progress of the park, which was supervised by the Park Commissioners and a Citizens Advisory Committee.<sup>27</sup>

A new plan was adopted for the park when

On December 16, 1922, the Park Commissioners appointed Messrs. Bakewell, Brown and Bauer architects for this project and instructed them to prepare a prospectus and plan for the entire scheme.<sup>28</sup>

The choice of architects was indeed interesting. "John Bakewell, Jr. and Arthur J. Brown, Jr. both had gained prominence in San Francisco for their numerous designs for commercial and civil structures in the city reborn after the 1906 earthquake. Among their greatest architectural achievements were the new City Hall Building (1917) and the Horticultural Building of the Panama Pacific International Exposition."<sup>29</sup> It is interesting since the two structures the firm is best known for were designed in the Beaux Arts style, which was preferred by Daniel Burnham and the adherents of the "City Beautiful." It is ironic, then, to note that a plan designed by Burnham, only to be refused and forgotten, would be suggested by the architectural tastes of the firm designated to plan Aquatic Park.

The plan was approved by both the Park Commission and the Board of Supervisors in 1923, opening the way for further development of the park.<sup>30</sup> Based on the Bakewell and Brown plan, the park was to keep many of the lines designed previously by Punnett. The plan called for a massive recreation pier to stretch into the bay from the northeast tip of Black Point, which was presently occupied by the Quartermaster's Pier. In addition, the plan also called for

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<sup>26</sup> Report of the Bureau of Engineering, City of San Francisco, 1921-1922, n.d., n.p.

<sup>27</sup> Journal of Proceedings, Board of Supervisors...August 1, 1927, page 1437.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Toogood, Volume II, pages 131-132.

<sup>30</sup> Toogood, Volume II, page 132.

Construction of various buildings, bathhouses, boat-landings, beaches, driveways, approaches, and planting and landscaping the entire park area...<sup>31</sup>

In order to implement the plan, the city began to push for the acquisition of yet more land, mainly land alongside the eastern edge of the Fort Mason Military Reservation and the submerged lands of the cove which was under the jurisdiction of the State Harbor Commissioners. The legal proceedings for these acquisitions would drag on for some five years, delaying the construction process. In 1924, the State Legislature approved the transfer of the submerged lands to the city, and the only obstacle to construction was the approval from the War Department, which was necessary because of the planned removal of the Quartermaster's Pier and the use of some of the military lands on the east edge of the reservation.

Meanwhile, impatient at the delays from Washington, the city authorized the expenditure of funds to extend Van Ness Avenue to the northeast tip of Black Point. This required the relocation of the various rowing clubhouses at the foot of Van Ness, which was accomplished in 1927 at a cost of \$10,000. The clubhouses were moved to the foot of Polk Street.<sup>32</sup> Thus, by the end of 1926,

...the city had expended \$378,799.96 for improvements, grading, sewer, railroad relocation, plans, surveys, labor, and land acquisition for Aquatic Park, but only \$10,000 had been appropriated in the 1926 to 1927 fiscal year....But in August the Board of Supervisors learned that it had not only taken funds from the Aquatic Park account and had not replaced it, but that the projected cost of the proposed park construction was \$1,500,000...<sup>33</sup>

The money was simply too much for the city to raise, so a bond issue was prepared for presentation to the voters in hopes of raising \$950,000. Known as Bond Issue 59, the Aquatic Park bond was heavily advertised. Slogans like "People Demand and Deserve A Safe Place to SWIM, ROW, FISH in the Heart of San Francisco" and "Make the Bay A Safe Place to Play" were utilized.<sup>34</sup> Recalling the previous election of 1912, when the bond was approved by the majority of voters but had not legally passed because of a lack of the two-thirds majority, the placards exhorted voters to "REMEMBER A TWO THIRDS MAJORITY IS REQUIRED FOR THE APPROVAL OF THIS PROJECT."

Meanwhile, the problems with the military ceased when on March 28, 1928, Congress approved the removal of the Quartermaster's Pier for the construction

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<sup>31</sup> Journal of Proceedings, Board of Supervisors, August 1, 1927, page 1437.

<sup>32</sup> Toogood, Volume 2, page 135.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, pages 134-135.

<sup>34</sup> "AQUATIC PARK," Original Election Cards. Archives of the Society of California Pioneers. San Francisco.

of the recreation pier, provided the city built a new one. Heartened by this, the Board of Supervisors voted for a \$100,000 appropriation for Aquatic Park for the next year, hoping that the long-awaited federal approval and their action would win the election. Unfortunately, just as in 1912, the issue failed when less than a two-thirds majority was achieved. However, "the Board of Supervisors had committed themselves to the construction of the well-publicized recreation pier, and plans went forward to see its completion."<sup>35</sup> Thus it seemed Aquatic Park construction was to continue, even at a slow pace, until completion. The pace would be slowed even more by the great depression looming on the horizon, and would only be quickened by the introduction of federal aid through the Works Progress Administration.

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35 Toogood, Volume II, page 136.

## 6. AQUATIC PARK CONSTRUCTION BEGINS, 1930-1938

Notwithstanding the initial efforts to grade and prepare the filled land that the City of San Francisco had purchased at Black Point lagoon for a public park, the first construction effort began in 1930, when a concrete municipal pier was built at the site of the former Army Quartermaster's Pier at the northwest corner of Black Point. This single action would be the impetus for the City fathers to fulfill the goal of an Aquatic Park for San Francisco, even though the pier construction would not be completed nor public facilities built until the advent of the Works Progress Administration and Federal funding in 1936.

### A. Municipal Pier

As outlined earlier in Chapter Four, the ideal location for the new city pier was on the site of the Army Quartermaster's Pier at the northwest corner of the Black Point Military Reservation, by that time named Fort Mason. After receiving approval from the government to build on the site, the Army contracted with M.B. McGowan to remove and rebuild the wharf at a cost of \$30,357, which was charged to the City of San Francisco. The new wharf was completed in early 1931; it still exists and is known as "Pier 4" or the Alcatraz Pier. It is technically outside the boundaries of Aquatic Park, hence no detailed account of its history will be cited. The City presented the new wharf to the military on June 22, 1931, noting that this entitled the City to build a new recreation pier at the site of the old wharf and that the new wharf "reverted to municipal ownership if the government ever permanently ceased to use it."<sup>1</sup> Work on the new concrete recreation pier began on about August 17, 1931.<sup>2</sup> The city had contracted with the Healy-Tibbets Construction Company to build approximately 636 feet; or about 1/3 of the eventual length of the completed structure. The first work report by foreman Bill Hansen detailed the amount of progress made by December 21:

Started work on Aquatic Park August 17, 1931, with 22 men cleaned property from Polk to Larkin on Beach Street to the beach; graded property from Polk to Larkin on Beach Street to 6 inches below curb....Moved dirt to make parking place off Beach Street. Excavated below railroad and towards the beach from Larkin Street to a point near the Rowing Club, placing dirt on fill for parking space, and borrowed small R.R. hand-car from Belt railroad, built dump-car, moving balance of dirt to a point near Van Ness Ave, and south of the railroad trestle where a cribbing was built of salvaged lumber.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Toogood, Historic Resource Study, Volume II, page 136.

<sup>2</sup> Journal of Proceedings, Board of Supervisors, City and County of San Francisco, Monday, December 21, 1931, page 3458.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, page 3458.

The former seawall and small walkway around Black Point's east side was slowly filled in by many thousands of cubic yards of fill dumped along the water's edge to form a broad platform for an extended Van Ness Avenue that would run out to meet the new pier. This work would not be completed, and the road finally graded, until 1935-6. A crude new seawall of concrete rubble and huge blocks was dropped into place to hold the unconsolidated fill; this wall would later be demolished and its lower portions used as the base for the cobblestone seawall built by the Works Progress Administration.

At the same time the grading and filling operation was in full swing, casting for concrete pilings of the pier had begun. The green wood piles had been driven for the entire extent of the proposed pier, and casting of the concrete jackets was complete by December.<sup>4</sup> The same month Engineer L.D. Smith estimated the project was "48.6 per cent complete."<sup>5</sup> In addition to the grading and pier construction, several tons of cobblestones from San Francisco streets being repaved with asphalt were being hauled to the site; twenty-two truckloads on August 28, 1931, twelve railroad carloads on October 16, 1931, and twenty-five army trucks full of cobblestones were unloaded and stockpiled in the park.<sup>6</sup> These cobblestones would later be used to build the seawall during the mid-1930s.

Work on the pier progressed through 1932; by mid-1933 work was completed on the basic pier structure with an additional \$250,000 expenditure. In October of the same year, the City contracted with Meyer Brothers to outfit the curved 1,850 foot long pier with a parapet wall, seats, and concrete curbing for an estimated \$10,996.<sup>7</sup> Work was completed by Meyer Brothers in March of 1934. The pier stood ready for use but had not reached its present form; missing was the bulbed end and the round comfort-station/refreshment counter building in the center of the "bulb." Later work such as this, as well as repairs to the structure, will be outlined in later sections.

#### B. Plans and Problems

The City fathers were hopeful that money could be found to complete Aquatic Park. Even in the early stages of the project, signs had been posted along Beach Street announcing the "Site Of San Francisco's AQUATIC PARK To Be Erected By The Park Commissioners For The People Of San Francisco." The hopes of the Aquatic Park supporters, however, soon began to die. The construction of the municipal pier and the work done by hand labor to grade and prepare the site for the proposed park proceeded with small amounts of money and with borrowed tools and salvaged materials, such as the lumber used for cribbing

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<sup>4</sup> Journal of Proceedings....page 3459.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, page 3459.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, page 3459.

<sup>7</sup> Toogood, Historic Resource Study, Volume II, page 137.

and the tons of granite cobblestones hauled to the site. In November of 1931, the Parks Commission had authorized an expenditure of \$8,000 from the City's "Urgent Necessity" funds for the work; this was supplemented in January of 1933 by an additional \$10,000 from the Public Parks and Squares Fund.<sup>8</sup> However, it was clear that the plans for a series of buildings dedicated to aquatic pursuits, as well as the development of a sandy lagoon and the construction of an additional municipal pier to enclose the site as proposed in John Punnett's plan of 1920 and the Bakewell, Brown, and Bauer plan of 1922 would cost far too much for the city to be able to afford it. It seemed that the Aquatic Park project, which had taken almost three decades to get off the ground, was doomed to failure.

The passage of the National Recovery Act on June 17, 1933 gave hope to the park backers. The Board of Supervisors applied for NRA funds for Federal support of a number of civic projects, among them the completion of the city's sewage system, which would put an end to the raw sewage being pumped into Black Point Cove, and the construction of Aquatic Park and a proposed yacht harbor at the Marina, "two of the most important recreational developments in the City and County."<sup>9</sup> The City fathers pledged \$1,600,000 from any forthcoming NRA funds to complete Aquatic Park; in addition, they placed a bond measure on the ballot for the city to raise its part of the money needed to build the proposed

boat houses for rowing clubs, the creation of a bathing beach, park and playground areas, a concrete wharf to facilitate auto parking, bathhouses, convenience stations, service buildings, gymnasiums, hand ball courts, shower and locker rooms, solariums, and club quarters, grading and rock filling, construction of concrete seawall and retaining walls, and paving street promenade and sidewalk areas, relocating belt line railway and creating water and electric light systems and landscape gardening...<sup>10</sup>

The Aquatic Park proposal, Proposition 9, was placed on the ballot with other NRA projects which would contribute an additional six thousand jobs, which was clearly a selling point for the many unemployed workers caught in the economic depression. However, while other issues passed, Aquatic Park, traditionally, did not. "Construction at the site limped along in 1934 and 1935, in part with the aid of the State Emergency Relief Administration - (SERA) labor and private donations of equipment...."<sup>11</sup> The eventual demise of the NRA after it was declared unconstitutional by the United States Supreme Court also delayed the eventual construction of the park; however, a proposal submitted to the

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<sup>8</sup> Toogood, Historic Resource Study, Volume II, page 138.

<sup>9</sup> Journal of Proceedings, Board of Supervisors, 1933, page 1212.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Toogood, Historic Resource Study, Volume II, page 140.

newly created Works Progress Administration in December 1935 finally hit the mark, on December 19, 1935, the WPA approved the plans and work to begin construction on the long-awaited Aquatic Park was approved. Under the auspices of the WPA, the plans would be changed much as time and budget influences cut away at many of the proposed structures and areas; the final result was to be, though, extremely worthy of its appellation of a "Palace for the Public." As completed, the Aquatic Park complex, with its unity of architecture and design, its generally high quality materials, and its unusually exotic and carefully executed artworks, would be one of the more significant WPA projects on the California coast. Unfortunately, it was also to be one of the most cursed.

#### C. Enter the Works Progress Administration

One of the first acts of the City fathers after the approval of the Aquatic Park proposal was to hire John Punnett, who had drafted the original plan for the park in 1920, to prepare a new set of plans for the beginning of the WPA project. Punnett's new plans differed little from the Bakewell, Brown and Bauer plans; along these lines a small scale model was made and sites for buildings chosen. Work could now commence on the park.

#### D. The WPA Construction of Aquatic Park, 1936-1938

Works Progress Administration Workers began to arrive on the job site in early 1936. The initial construction activity was the beginning of a concrete and stone seawall to encompass the project site and prepare a supported area for the proposed bathhouse at the foot of Polk Street. This work required the movement, once again, of the belt line railroad, which was brought back from the water even further south toward Beach street. Concrete foundations were then prepared, and the thousands of cobblestones hauled to the site between 1931 and 1933 were laid by masons into a stepped seawall that ran along the rubble beach, gradually rising and curving along the shoreline until it reached the base of the Municipal Pier. The former rubble and concrete seawall haphazardly constructed in 1931 near the Municipal Pier was torn down; its base served as the foundation for the new wall; the debris, along with the rubble from the beach and earth graded from the site, was used to backfill the seawall and extend the land for Aquatic Park further into the cove.

With the seawall completed, additional fill was brought in to extend Van Ness Avenue to the Municipal Pier. The final work done to complete the wall was done at the terminus of the road, where tombstones removed from defunct city cemeteries were cut and shaped to make a flat plug between the original military seawall of 1911 and the new WPA seawall, closing an opening between the two walls and allowing for fill up to the end of Municipal Pier. Van Ness Avenue was then graded and paved, allowing construction trucks and other vehicles onto the site from all sides.

Once the seawall was complete, it also meant that work could begin on the various structures planned for Aquatic Park. In June of 1936, William Mooser, the architect selected to draft the plans for the buildings, noted that WPA work on the project was to consist of the construction of the seawall from masonry, "all of which has been salvaged from reconstructed streets,

cemeteries, etc....providing access to the present municipal pier...."<sup>12</sup> Since money was not unlimited, all of the structures planned for Aquatic Park could not be built immediately; it was decided that the money and energy would initially be expended on the construction of "a bath house to accomodate some 5,000 people, the greater part of which is below street grade and acts as a retaining wall for Beach street...."<sup>13</sup> Also planned were a boathouse for Sea Scouts activities and a new boat and clubhouse for the various rowing clubs, whose existing buildings were to be removed. Three comfort stations were also planned; comfort station number one was to be built at the west end of the park near the end of the Municipal Pier on Van Ness Avenue; comfort station number two was to be built at the east end of the park at the terminus of Jefferson Street; comfort station number three was to be built on the end of the Municipal Pier. Also planned were landscaped grounds and gardens, which would be decorated by modern sculpture done by WPA artists in the Federal Art Program.

Problems with the project, typically, began almost immediately. According to the official WPA investigation of the project,

The project was barely under way when difficulties were encountered in regard to construction details and revisions of original plans. Shortly after the project was started Mr. Leroy Frasier was appointed as superintendent on the recommendation of the sponsor's engineer, who informed him that the Federal government was squandering funds under inexperienced supervision...The reconstruction of the State Railroad connecting Fort Mason with the piers caused considerable delay. After providing for its location along Beach street, the plans were changed for a location between the seawall and the bath house. Additional loss of time was caused by delays in delivery of materials. Plans were prepared for the boat houses and materials were ordered and arrangements made to pour the concrete piles when orders were received to discontinue this operation and to concentrate all activities on the bath house. The elevation of the bath was raised two feet to prevent inundation of the basement during high tides.<sup>14</sup>

The project was also plagued by a serious lack of direction and purpose. The WPA later stated that

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<sup>12</sup> Project Files, Project #65-3-2014, Aquatic Park. RG 69, Works Progress Administration, Reel 13-447. Letter of William A. Mooser, Jr. to L.M. Canady, June 2, 1936.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Investigation Report, Aquatic Park. NARG 69, WPA, Box 902, File 651.109. Memorandum to H.E. Smith from J.J. Mieldazis; Summary of Investigation, October 23, 1939, page 5.

The project was under the supervision of at least six different WPA superintendents during the course of construction, yet few of those interviewed were able to give a concise description of the intended use of the building. One person interviewed stated that the building was constructed from the "outside in" without much serious study of its intended use....The mere fact that so many changes were made is proof that the project was developed as it progressed. One person remarked" "It was like Topsy, it just grew." Mr. Frasier, when asked regarding a complete set of plans for the project, stated that the plans were usually a month behind the construction. The plans were revised so often, he stated, that it was difficult to identify the current plans....Instances were cited showing that completed work had to be torn out because of changes made. Plumbing and electrical features had been changed so often that William Mooser, Sr. stated that it would be difficult to determine the exact locations of all of the final installations.<sup>15</sup>

One glaring example of the changes made almost daily to the project, and of additional construction added at the spur of the moment, can be found in the pantry on the third floor of the building, which is now used as the library of the Maritime Museum. According to the WPA,

One outstanding change was the addition of a pantry to the enclosed gallery on the third floor. The original use for which this floor was intended was changed, according to William Mooser, Sr., when the project was being inspected by the Mayor and his party; at this time someone suggested the use of the room as a banquet hall. The only access to this room for food from the kitchen below was by way of the main stairway and through the main public lounge. In order to provide for the serving of banquets, a pantry was provided and later a dumb waiter was installed connecting the pantry with the main kitchen on the second floor. This added to the difficulties of an already crowded kitchen....In order to make a pantry it was necessary to remove a portion of the stainless steel frame for the glass at the end of the building and construct a partition wall to screen off the pantry from the banquet hall....A sink was installed in the pantry and the floor space was further reduced and cut up by the flue from the boiler room and a fresh air duct which originally opened to the open deck.<sup>16</sup>

Work on the building dragged on for some two years. Eventually, the delays and the slow pace of work, estimated at about 3 percent progress per month, caused the removal of the boathouses from the project; there was simply not enough time or money to complete the original project. Delays still plagued

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<sup>15</sup> Investigation Report, Aquatic Park. NARG 69, WPA, Box 902, File 651.109. page 5.

<sup>16</sup> Smith/Mieldazis Memorandum, October 23, 1939, page 6.

the project, with construction changes being insisted upon by both the city and the concessioners to whom the city had leased the premises. These delays eventually forced the WPA to withdraw from the project, leaving the work incomplete.

Construction photographs of the project show that by October 12, 1936, work on the stainless steel frame of the building had commenced; the first and second floors were framed and work was to commence on the third; one month later, however, finds that no significant progress had been made. On December 3, 1936, some concrete had been poured on the second floor, and finally, on December 28, 1936, work commenced on the third floor framing.<sup>17</sup> By January 20, 1937, the third floor was half framed; March of the same year saw some concrete pouring done. Basically, by September of 1937 the exterior of the building was roughly finished; the inside, however, remained largely incomplete. The photographs also show that work on the last minute addition to the third floor, the pantry, had begun in October of 1937; a photograph dated October 27 shows the glass block walls being laid.<sup>18</sup>

In January of 1938 much of the external work was done; the building stood more or less complete and ready for painting; however, work on the internal decorations and fixtures still dragged on. The lawn areas had been graded and were being prepared for planting, and final work on the last relocation of the belt line railroad along the stretch of land between the seawall and the bath house was being done. The concrete was being poured for two large speaker towers at each end of the park, and work was nearing completion on two of the three comfort stations. Gravel was being laid for the pouring of concrete sidewalks behind the seawall and for a concrete retaining wall which would support the belt line tracks as they climbed the hill to the tunnel portal on the east side of Black Point. All of this was being done in compliance with the strict WPA order that "every effort should be made to complete the the ground floor, by October 1, 1938."<sup>19</sup>

Work commenced in April of 1938 with the concrete bleachers over the men's dressing rooms on the west wing of the building and the women's dressing rooms on the west wing.<sup>20</sup> Work on the men's bleachers were 50 percent complete by April 14, 1938.<sup>20</sup> For once, it seemed that work was proceeding at a fast pace. This was not to be the case for long, though. Even with the bleachers poured and the various buildings being painted in May and June of 1938, photographs of the interiors still show vastly incomplete areas. No wall tile had

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<sup>17</sup> Photograph Album, Aquatic Park Construction, 1935-1939. Collection of the National Maritime Museum, San Francisco. 148 photographs of the construction by the WPA. N-1130.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, N-866.

<sup>19</sup> Smith/Mieldazis Memorandum, October 23, 1939.

<sup>20</sup> Photograph Album, Aquatic Park, N-1884.

been applied, the showers were rough concrete areas, the murals in the main lounge were half complete, and many of the "finishing touches" such as light fixtures, toilets, and banisters for stairways were yet to be installed. Problems arose when the city leased the unfinished bath house to Leo and Kenneth Gordon for use as a restaurant in order to raise money. Even as WPA crews raced to finish the project, the Gordon brother,

anxious to utilize space for use other than that for which it was intended, had costly changes made to installations and construction already completed. The grand concession on the ground floor, intended for package goods and soda fountain sales, was enlarged in scope....<sup>21</sup>

The project was rapidly degenerating into a private benefit at the public expense. Work still dragged on in a typical fashion. In fairness to the workers, and to the project supervisor, William A. Mooser, Sr., it should be pointed out that the delays were caused not by poor work or a lack of drive; rather, the constant changes in plan, the lack of clear direction, and the lack of materials all contributed. Mooser, in later years, reflected on the lack of materials, proudly pointed out the self-sufficiency of the project--and perhaps attempted to explain, in his own way, why it took so long:

We made everything on the scene that we could. We had a regular machine shop--had our own mill for doing mill work--made our own electrical fixtures--had our own foundry. Had a blacksmith shop--made our own wrought iron work. We made our requisitions for what we had to buy--glass, stainless steel frame of the building--and sent it to the Treasury Department in Washington. We contracted for almost nothing except steel frame of the building and the fabrication of stainless steel.<sup>22</sup>

Finally, the WPA, "weary of the slow progress, and worn out by the repeated revisions and delays resulting from the lack of proper supervision and planning, arranged to turn the project over to the city on January 22, 1939."<sup>23</sup>

#### E. WPA Artworks and the Aquatic Park Project

In addition to the construction work in Aquatic Park, the WPA also provided artworks for the completed structure. Murals in both wax fresco and tile,

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<sup>21</sup> Smith/Mieldazis Memorandum, October 23, 1939, page 8.

<sup>22</sup> Notes from an interview with William A. Mooser, Sr. taken by Karl Kortum, San Francisco Maritime Museum, n.d.

<sup>23</sup> Smith/Mieldazis Memorandum, page 9.

sculpture and terrazo floors were crafted by WPA artisans under the auspices of the Federal Art Project. Prior to the depression, private and some limited governmental relief had been available for artists. "But it was the WPA that created a national program to embrace all the major visual art forms and activities."<sup>24</sup> Under the WPA, some five thousand artists nationwide contributed over "100,000 easel paintings in oil, watercolor, tempera, and pastel; nearly 18,000 pieces of sculpture; about 2,500 murals; and some 250,000 prints of over 11,000 original designs in the graphic media."<sup>25</sup> Style and content were not dictated by the Federal Art Project; the artists were free, in principle at least, to paint in whatever style they chose. Content varied according to the expectations of individual project directors, but the usual style of WPA art, or at least the WPA mural, was a patriotic motif. Others followed some in

examining the nature of their society. They wanted to know what was wrong and how and why it had come to this crisis. Historians, economists, sociologists were analyzing the available information, and artists were commenting in their own special language.<sup>26</sup>

Rarely, however, did the WPA artists choose abstract or surrealistic motifs or designs. The Aquatic Park artworks, however, are in this style and thus stand as rare and unique examples.

The WPA art project at Aquatic Park was perhaps a step backward in the view of some art historians; its style was that of the "experimental modernism of cubism, futurism and the like" and "had been on the decline in America for more than a decade by the time of the great stock market crash of late 1929."<sup>27</sup> Instead of the "isms" of Paris, American artists were seeking "to paint American subjects in a representational style."<sup>28</sup> The artist selected to head the effort at Aquatic Park was, interestingly, a Paris-educated member of the expatriate colony of Americans living in France. His name was Hilaire Hiler.

Hilaire Hiler was born on July 16, 1898 in St. Paul, Minnesota. His father, Meyer Hiler, was an amateur artist who painted in the primitive style and made a living as a "longtime notions seller and theatrical agent." The young boy

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<sup>24</sup> Milton Meltzer, Violins and Shovels: The WPA Arts Projects. (New York: Delacorte Press, 1976), page 56.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, page 62.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, page 63.

<sup>27</sup> Steven Gelber, "Working to Prosperity: California's New Deal Murals." In California History. Volume LVIII, Number 2. (San Francisco: California Historical Society, Summer 1979), page 101.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, page 101.

was raised in Providence, Rhode Island, where he embarked on his long artistic career, enrolling in a local art class. During his lifetime, Hiler was to enroll in several schools: the Moses Brown School; the University of Pennsylvania; and the Philadelphia Academy of Fine Arts. Unfortunately, whatever artistic designs the elder Hiler may have had, he attempted to discourage the same in his son. Insisting that Hilaire learn finance, he sent him to the University of Pennsylvania. Hilaire "flunked out two years later". He then enrolled in the Philadelphia Academy of Fine Arts but left when they informed him "he could never learn to draw."<sup>29</sup> Hilaire's response was to leave the United States and head for France. It seems that his judged talent was narrowly assessed, for he was a moderately successful Paris artist and a member of the famed Parisian expatriate colony. In addition to decorating various Paris nightclubs and cafes with his murals, Hiler also produced art for author Robert McAlmon's books and interacted with the bohemian nightlife by playing the piano at the Jockey, a Paris nightclub. His specialty was jazz. In addition, Hilaire attended the University of Paris, the Cite Universitaire, L'Academie Moderne, and Otto Rank's Institute of Psychoanalysis of the Sorbonne. Author Anais Nin met Hiler at the Institute and recorded her impressions of him: Big, loud, overflowing.<sup>30</sup> Hiler poured out his problems to Nin, explaining why he was at Rank's school:

He was born with huge ears, half the size of his head. They stood out. They were an object of ridicule. They made a monster of him. He did not date expect love from women. He only trusted prostitutes. Then his ears were operated upon by a specialist who had made much practice from plastic surgery on wounded soldiers, the Gueules Cassees, after the war. He made his ears look almost normal. They were no longer noticeable. Hilaire Hiler had, all his life, attributed his complexes, inferiorities, difficulties in relationships, to his ears. He felt if he overcame this handicap his life would be changed. When the ears became normal, he expected a total change in his feelings towards people. But the pyschic state did not change as quickly, as radically. He did not become, overnight, a confident man, sure of love, bold in courting, natural, easygoing. The change was external. The inner pattern was set, and as if engraved on his unconscious. He refused then to continue psychoanalytical help. He felt he should not need it, a man with normal ears. Why should a man with normal ears need help to live? He decided to become an analyst. Painting was not a way to earn a living. He wanted to have a dignified profession. That was why he was here, today, following Dr. Rank's courses.<sup>31</sup>

Perhaps the inner reason behind Hiler's problems was not his ears--it was probably his father, who had attempted to turn the boy away from art. As Nin

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<sup>29</sup> Time Magazine, Volume 33, Number 6, February 6, 1939, page 41.

<sup>30</sup> Anais Nin, The Diary of Anais Nin, edited by Gunther Stuhlmann. (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1967.) Volume 2, page 325.

<sup>31</sup> Nin, Diary Volume 2, pages 325-326.

related, Hiler Sr. was "half American Indian, half Jew. Hiler is six feet tall, his father was small. He was a painter, too, he exerted a tremendous tyranny over Hilaire, at the same time, Hilaire admires him."<sup>32</sup>

In Paris, Hiler made other friends beside Nin. Henry Miller, James Joyce, Sinclair Lewis, Ezra Pound, Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and other members of the American expatriate colony knew and befriended Hilaire. According to one tale of those years, "when the nearly blind James Joyce could not see a drawing Hiler made of the writer's head, Hiler did another in thick charcoal which Joyce could follow with his fingers." Besides his art work, Hiler also followed more "intellectual pursuits," being one of the founding editors of Samuel Putnam's New Review, which was "one half of an always precarious publishing business Putnam maintained for a few years in the early thirties...the New Review offered what Putnam called "an international reportage for the arts, the higher journalism of ideas."<sup>33</sup> Hiler served as Art Director and as a contributing editor.

Hiler apparently also taught art. In 1933, author Henry Miller, "convinced that "life writes itself in terms of color,"

took painting lessons from Hilaire Hiler--one of the modern masters of color--with the hope that he would learn how to visualize the vast material of his present and future books in graphic and symbolic form. Experience was repeated by red, idea by blue, and the unconscious by yellow. These primary colors symbolised the primary status of being. Violet, the strong mingling of thought and experience, symbolises the dream state; orange is the product of the combination of experience and the unconscious and symbolises the life of the streets. White is no color at all and suggests the prenatal, while black is the absence of color, death. When the inability to live or the yearning for extinction invades the private impulses of man, a pale life, a grey or brown life, results. Only in that perfect time when the strong impulses of the unconscious mix vitally with ideas does spring (green) appear. At present, Henry believed, green was drenched with black; it was a "Black Spring." He had arrived at a concept and a title!<sup>34</sup>

More importantly, the incident of Miller's tutelage points to Hiler's pioneer work in the field of color. In his lifetime, Hiler was to publish several treatises on color and on his Hiler Color Chart. He was also one of the

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32 Nin, Diary, Volume 2, page 328.

33 Hugh Ford, Published in Paris: American and British Writers, Printers, and Publishers in Paris, 1920-1939. (Yonkers, New York: Pushcart Press, 1980), page 318.

34 Jay Martin, Be Always Merry and Bright: The Life of Henry Miller...an Unauthorized Biography. (Santa Barbara: Capra Press, 1978), page 295.

earliest figures in the art and psychiatric worlds to investigate the psychological meanings of color. His interests and work in color would come into full play with his work at Aquatic Park; he designed and painted a mural based on his color chart in one of the rooms, which was his first practical application of the chart.

Hiler, like the other expatriate Americans, soon returned home after a fourteen year hiatus. According to a tongue-in-cheek biography, Hiler left Paris because during the depression "when the dollar fell so low that a whiskey neat cost 72 in Paris, Hiler announced, 'the position is untenable' and started for home."<sup>35</sup> More than likely, Hiler needed to return home to find a sense of direction, of commitment. Nin, noting his behavior just before his departure for the United States, noted that Hiler manifested "clownish moods....Hiler pulling towards idiocy, pranks....Hiler so puffed, worn, stained with living, pursuing Miss Fleming the virgin, and me at the same time. Hiler all worn at the edges."<sup>36</sup> Hiler returned to New York, where he met up with some old friends and made some new ones, including William Carlos Williams, the poet, Nathanael West, author of "The Day of the Locust," author James T. Farrell, and author William Saroyan. When Miller returned to the United States, he became acquainted with Hiler once again. In New York Hiler also made the acquaintance of the WPA officials at the New York headquarters of the Federal Art Project. Hiler applied, and was accepted, as a WPA artist, and soon was on his way to San Francisco in 1936 to begin the planning of the decoration of Aquatic Park's bathhouse.

In San Francisco, Hiler was joined by three other artists; sculptor Sargent Johnson, the only Black WPA artist in Northern California (and the second of two Black WPA artists in California), controversial sculptor Beniamino Bufano, and artisans Richard Ayer and John Glut. Together, under Hiler's direction, the four men carried out a long and difficult program of work that resulted in one of the more opulent and unique examples of WPA construction in California and the Western United States.

Hiler began work by looking at the exterior of the building as it was going up. As he later said:

Ferro-concrete, glass, and stainless steel. Its curved ends enclose two perfectly circular rooms, the form of which influenced my ideas as to how it might be adequately decorated....The streamlined two hundred and fifty feet of its length is visible above the eight-hundred-foot bathhouse which is partially underground. Its modernity reassured me. Architecturally it would provide a framework into which modern painting and principles of decoration would naturally fit. The situation was fortunate also in that I was

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<sup>35</sup> Time Magazine, February 6, 1939, page 41.

<sup>36</sup> Nin, Diary, Volume 2, page 333.

privileged to meet and talk with the architects at a very early stage in the building's construction and could thus have a finger in every part of the pie; to design floors, wainscotings, electric fixtures, sculptured low-relief carvings, tile mosaics, color harmonies for the ceilings as well as the ceilings themselves. Such a situation is all too rare in the life of the contemporary artist. The opportunity carried considerable responsibility with it; but the sort of responsibility which is gladly shouldered. There would be no aesthetic quarrel in style between the architectural setting and the mural decoration as far as I was concerned.<sup>37</sup>

Hiler, while responsible for directing the overall artwork in the bathhouse, was principally responsible for painting a series of murals in the main lounge and in the ladies' lounge on the west end of the second floor. Richard Ayer was assigned the decoration of the third floor, while Sargent Johnson carved the entrance portico and supervised the laying of a tile mosaic on the back porch; John Glut designed the light fixtures.

Work on the artworks, like work on the construction, lagged with the frequent delays. By mid-1928, work was not complete; the murals were approximately one-third complete and the tile mosaics only half done. Provisions were made for the artists to work beyond the official termination date of January 22, 1939, but did not work. Difficulties arose with the concessioner, the Gordon Brothers, who demanded that the artists hurry and complete their tasks. Hiler was not allowed to complete his murals when he protested.

I have been kept out of the building on orders of someone or other and can only get in there now by showing a written pass. In the main lounge, the ladders were taken out literally from under my feet so that I was unable to properly finish the decorations there.<sup>38</sup>

Sargent Johnson, angered at what he considered a criminal private use of the public facilities, refused to complete the tile mosaics. Beniamino Bufano, also angered, refused to turn over many of his sculpted works for the building. Eventually, Bufano's complaints would be one of the major catalysts for an investigation of wrong-doing on the project by the City and the concessioners.

The public and the critics were nonetheless impressed with Hiler's work and the work of his various assistants when the building was opened to the public for dedication day ceremonies on January 22. Noted the San Francisco Chronicle, "San Franciscans will see for the first time what a fine artist and his assistants can do when given carte blanche, a fairly decent length of time and

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<sup>37</sup> Hilaire Hiler, "An Approach to Mural Design," n.d.

<sup>38</sup> Letter from Hilaire Hiler, 1938. Files of the Art Department, the Oakland Museum, California.

the cooperation of the Federal Government." The unfinished character notwithstanding, the Chronicle also noted "the chalk marks are still visible upon the walls. However, to the untrained eye, the murals will be extraordinary and beautiful and entirely satisfying."

Hiler's work also attracted national attention when Time Magazine's February 6, 1939 issue commented:

If San Francisco...should presently become as distinguished for its arts as for its setting, San Franciscans would owe many thanks to the WPA. Already hopeful of this, San Francisco WPA officials were as pleased as Punch last week at the dedication of one of the most sophisticated WPA building jobs in the U. S.--a new, \$1,500,000 Aquatic Park overlooking the Golden Gate...for the last two years, large, free speaking Hilaire Hiler has been in San Francisco, working mostly on the Aquatic Park murals. Those in the central lounge he designed and mainly executed himself. Their subject is the submerged continents of Mu and Atlantis in the green depths of the sea...Unquestionably Hiler's masterpiece, this mural embodies a refinement of intelligent detail and one of the most thoroughly studied color systems now at the command of an artist...

The San Francisco Chronicle also praised Hiler's murals, noting that;

Mr. Hiler has put into the murals everything he has learned in all his years. Freudian scholars will recognize the psychological content. Artists will marvel at the color and form. Literateurs will be pleased with the intellectual concept of these brilliant arabesques.

Hiler's old friend Henry Miller also enjoyed the murals, devoting an entire chapter to them in his book The Air-Conditioned Nightmare:

When I got to the Aquatic Park building I began to laugh-naturally. It was like reading a man's palm. Some people get frightened when they read palms. They see accidents, fiascos, travelogues, disease and dysentery. Well, I looked at Hiler's murals and I saw many things. It was very definitely a sub-aquaeous world. It was also very definite that Hiler was at home in it. Not surprising, because he is at home everywhere....The murals...Well there were fish such as I had never seen before, such as perhaps few people have, unless they are lucky enough to enjoy delirium tremens occasionally. Hiler swears that he invented none of them—that they all exist and have a name, and I suppose a genus and a locus vivendi, too. I wouldn't think of questioning his erudition, because it is too vast for me. I know only a few fish, the edible kind mostly, such as sea bass, blue fish, porgy, mackerel, herring, etc. And filet of sole, which is my favorite dish. These are ordinary fish and Hiler was probably bored with them. So he dug up some rare specimens and began recreating their habitat, which is in the mind, of course. The curious thing is that though the decor was distinctly Freudian it was also gay, stimulating and superlatively healthy. Even when the

fish became abstract they were tangible and edible and very jocose ....And though they are embalmed for all time they have nothing of the museum, the cemetery, or the morgue about them.<sup>39</sup>

Hiler was eventually allowed to return to Aquatic Park and complete his murals. This was not to happen, however, until 1949, a full decade after the project ended. His return to the murals will be detailed in a later chapter. The Aquatic Park project marked a dramatic change in Hiler's painting style. Where before his style had been somewhat primitive, Hiler now switched to abstract art. This was in part due to his studies in color, but it had come about while he was working at Aquatic Park. There, he attempted to paint the house painters that he worked with--

They'd been painting a wall which was about half finished...the first coat was white; the second coat was whiter. As you know, they dress in white overalls and wear white caps...they had a white drop cloth...These two painters were all in white and all these whites were different...I found out in the long run that the only way I could use these different whites and not completely distract attention from what I considered, and still consider their beautiful and subtle relationship was to leave out the hands and faces, and the painters, and there I was,--abstract as hell!<sup>40</sup>

Hiler's abstract painting marked an important shift in his career. Hiler's work had started as somewhat primitive, shifted to abstract and finally ended as "Structuralist." Hiler was a proponent of structuralism, which he explained as "one of the forms of non-objective painting, represents the harmonious relations of structure and order." Structuralism has also been described as "Scientific Method applied to art."

Hiler spent the last years of his life painting, lecturing and writing about structuralism. He lived, at times, in Mexico and France, and then in Santa Fe, New Mexico. He was residing in Paris when he died on January 21, 1966, at the age of 68. The San Francisco Chronicle, in noting his passing, called him "...the noted painter and colorist whose works included the huge submarine murals at San Francisco's Aquatic Park pavilion."

In retrospect, Hiler was one of the influential figures in Modern Art. His reputation and influence were international. His works, both books and articles, number well over thirty. He is read in French, English and Spanish. His works have been exhibited in the Palace of the Legion of Honor in San Francisco, the New York Museum of Modern Art, and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. His works have also been added to the collections of

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<sup>39</sup> Henry Miller, The Air-Conditioned Nightmare. (New York: New Directions, 1945), pages 279-280.

<sup>40</sup> Hilaire Hiler, Henry Miller, William Saroyan, Why Abstract? (New York: New Directions, n.d.), pages 24-25.

many influential art collectors--Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Libby Gump, Henry Miller, William Saroyan, Daniel W. Blumenthal, Chevy Chase, Hazel Guggenheim, John Barrymore, Ezra Pound, Alfred Morang, and many others. Hiler may not be popular since and many of his works are unknown to the layman, but his work and achievements command respect.

## 7. THE PROJECT ENDS, 1939-1948

With the end of WPA involvement in 1939, work at Aquatic Park ground to a halt. The proposed boathouses and club building for the rowing clubs and the sea scouts were never to be built, nor was the additional municipal pier built that would have surrounded the small cove. On Dedication Day, January 22, 1939, many features of the "completed" structures were unfinished; murals with chalk marks and missing portions, half of the tile mosaics incomplete, and the three comfort stations only half done. Another fact marred the otherwise happy event of dedication; the supposedly public building had been leased to private concessioners and was in fact, no longer public. The many supporters and benefactors of the Aquatic Park cause believed they had been cheated.

### A. Dedication Day

Aquatic Park, even though incomplete, was formally turned over to the City of San Francisco by the Works Progress Administration on January 22, 1939. The city promptly turned that event into a lavish dedication day ceremony. Even with the incomplete nature of the project, the city and the WPA officials had reason to be proud. The bathhouse building and the other completed structures were beautifully designed and were decorated in a lavish and opulent style, earning the sobriquet of "A Palace For The Public."

According to the WPA fact sheet for the project,

The finished park, protected by the great curve of the municipal pier, and the breakwater on the South, fills completely the need for a central water playland. Here one may bathe, swim, canoe, or sail. Here are held swimming and boat races and aquatic sports of all kinds. Here thousands of happy youngsters find protected playground in the water and on the shore. Here thousands of wearied adults may sink into warm, embracing sand, content to just lie and relax, and revel in the beauties spread before them.

The star of the show was the main building, the bathhouse. Likened to

a huge ship at its dock, at about the center of the promenade, stream lined and modern to the last degree, stands the main building. With rounded ends, set-back upper stories, porthole windows and ship rails, its resemblance to a luxurious ocean liner is indeed startling--Flanking the main building on both sides are large stadia, offering seats to many thousands who desire to watch athletic events, races, and the large crowd at play. Aquatic animals, carved in marble, stand sentinel over the sea-wall and stadia, and further carry out the marine motif.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> WPA Fact Sheet; "A Palace for the Public." 1939. Collections of the National Maritime Museum, San Francisco, page 1.

The WPA, interestingly, also noted that

Aquatic Park, although the work of thousands of minds and hands, seems so coordinated as to be the master stroke of one mind, one pair of hands. There is no sense of division between the sea, the buildings, the decorations--all seem as one, the perfect blend.<sup>2</sup>

The various decorations did receive much attention, from Hiler's startling and beautiful murals to Bufano's smooth and fluid animals carved in granite. Sleek seals in red granite marked one entrance, while a large bear-like animal with a pointed aluminum snout offered "The Prayer" at the Van Ness Avenue entrance. Small animals, such as a toad, a rabbit, and a mouse, were stylistically portrayed in black marble and were placed about the park. The fact that the sculpture was placed outside, instead of inside, as had been planned, was due to the fact that Bufano, when he discovered that the building had been leased to the Gordon brothers, had "indignantly" refused

to allow his art to be placed in the casino. "I would rather have kids playing over my statues," he exploded, "than to have drunks stumbling over them. And I'm no teetotaler either."<sup>3</sup>

Bufano outrage was downplayed on that January day; it would soon explode along with that of others and be the impetus for an investigation of the project and of the Gordon Brother's lease.

This submerged tension and anger over the non-public turn taken by the City for Aquatic Park was not evident on January 22; thousands of people jammed the park from one end to another to hear speeches and see the hoisting of the flag atop the fourth story flagpole modeled after a ship's mast. Thousands toured the lavish interior, marvelling at the electric eyes that triggered showers, the heat lamps in the "drying rooms," the dressing room facilities for 5,000, and the "specially constructed emergency hospital, completely equipped, containing an operating room, two wards, and rooms for nurses and physicians."<sup>4</sup> The effect was just what everyone had expected; euphoria and wonder at the magnificent "Palace." That euphoria would soon vanish in the harsh light of reality.

#### B. Aquatic Park Casino

As previously stated, the Aquatic Park facilities, incomplete as they were, had been leased by the City to private concessioners, Leo and Kenneth Gordon,

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<sup>2</sup> "A Palace For The Public," page 3.

<sup>3</sup> Howard Wilkening and Sonia Brown, Bufano: An Intimate Biography. (Berkeley: Howell-North Books, 1972), page 145.

<sup>4</sup> "A Palace For The Public," page 2.

for use as a restaurant and bar known as the "Aquatic Park Casino." According to the official WPA investigation of the lease, the City, "convinced...that the city would be unable to operate concessions at Aquatic Park without considerable loss, the Park Commission made arrangements to lease the concessions."<sup>5</sup> The reasons may have appeared sound on the surface; an estimate for janitorial services for the structure reached a minimum of \$1,500 each month.<sup>6</sup> The concessioners, Kenneth and Leo Gordon, were granted a lease by the City on September 21, 1938; it was approved by the Board of Supervisors on October 11, 1938.<sup>7</sup> Under the provisions of the lease, the Gordons were granted use of the entire bathhouse building except those portions devoted to showers and dressing rooms, the comfort stations at Van Ness Avenue and on the end of the municipal pier, "together with such other locations as may be mutually agreed upon in writing..." for a monthly rent of 8% of the monthly gross receipts, or 10% of the gross monthly receipts if sales totalled over \$15,000.<sup>8</sup> Under the terms of the lease agreement, the Gordons were to install some \$25,000 worth of improvements to the building at their own cost for the proposed operation, which would consist of

a restaurant, cafe, and soda fountain and for the sale of foods, beverages (including alcoholic beverages), cigars, cigarettes, tobacco, ice cream, candies, souvenirs, bathing suits, caps...beach novelties and the usual package goods ordinarily sold in connection with a restaurant....<sup>9</sup>

Most importantly, the lease granted the Gordons permission to "enter the demised premises during the construction of said building for the purpose of making installation of equipment, furnishings, and furniture...."<sup>10</sup> This provision in the lease would cause many problems, such as the city's insistence that the third floor be used as a banquet room (no doubt to benefit the upcoming lease deal to the Gordons) causing a delay as the pantry was added. In addition,

the confusion of the project was augmented by the advent of the concessionaire before the completion of the construction. The

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<sup>5</sup> Memorandum, J. Mieldazis to H.E. Smith, "Aquatic Park Investigation" October 23, 1939. NARG 69, WPA, Box 902, California. File 651.109, Aquatic Park, page 7.

<sup>6</sup> Mieldazis to Smith, October 23, 1939, page 7.

<sup>7</sup> Minutes of the Board of Supervisors, City and County of San Francisco, October 11, 1938, pages 148-153.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, page 149.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, page 149.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, page 149.

concessionaire, anxious to utilize space for use other than that for which it was intended, had costly changes made to installations and construction already completed. The grand concession on the ground floor, intended for package goods and soda fountain sales, was enlarged in scope to become a restaurant. A storage room located behind the grand concession was converted into a kitchen by the installation of a cooking range, two sinks and the construction of a refrigeration plant. The kitchen for the restaurant on the first floor was subject to revised lay-out plans to accomodate the cooking equipment purchased by the concessionaire. The crowded arrangement of this equipment is mute evidence of the struggle to get the most out of the space available. The only access to this kitchen is through the main lounge on the first floor or from the grand concession room on the ground floor. No provision was made for garbage disposal except through the main lounge or the public stairway leading to the ground floor. This problem was solved by cutting a hole in the kitchen wall on the Beach street side of the building and installing a garbage chute.<sup>11</sup>

A complaint of a more serious nature brought against the Gordons was that they completed some of their changes and installations with WPA personnel and materials. Some basis for the former can be seen in the preceding statement; basis for the latter is as follows:

It is difficult to determine how much of this work was done for the concessionaire by WPA...additional sinks were installed, metal flues and hoods were constructed for the cooking ranges, and two cross walls and a longitudinal wall were constructed for the refrigeration plant installed in the storage room on the ground floor. The cork for the refrigeration plant was installed by the concessionaire but the plastering done with WPA labor.<sup>12</sup>

Even though the lease to the Gordons had stated that they would not occupy the premises until the facilities were complete, they were operating on January 22, 1939--Dedication Day.<sup>13</sup>

A "Grand Opening Dinner" for the Aquatic Park Casino was held on Saturday, February 11, 1939 at 8 o'clock in the evening. For \$2.50, guests received a meal of "Celery en Branch, Jumbo Olives, Crab Legs-Casino, Consomme Double, Broiled Tenderloin Steak aux Champignon, New Peas au Beurre, Rissole Potatoes, Hearts of Lettuce and Tomato, Aquatic Park Special Dressing, Chocolate Sundae,

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<sup>11</sup> Mieldazis/Smith Memorandum, page 8.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, page 9.

<sup>13</sup> Report of Agent Joseph P. Fallon, November 14, 1939, Investigation of Aquatic Park project by WPA Division of Investigation, page 1.

Petits Four Glaces," and an "After Dinner Mint."<sup>14</sup> These inexpensive prices would soon rise; a regular menu for the restaurant shows many prices above one dollar; the restaurant was an expensive one for its time. The various rooms and decks of the bathhouse, intended for and built with public use in mind, were utilized by the Casino in an exclusive manner:

...the radio room on the fourth floor is being used as a cocktail lounge; the third floor is being used for private banquets; the dining room and kitchen on the second floor and the concessions on the first floor, and one of the concessions in the comfort stations (the other station not being complete) are being used....<sup>15</sup>

In addition, "the Gordons also used the women's lounge as a cocktail room for a short while and are now using the caretaker's apartment as an office, neither of these latter spaces being within the terms of the lease."<sup>16</sup>

Complaints about the non-public nature of the facility began to quickly surface. The bathing facilities were still closed, and a scant covering of sand placed on the beach soon washed away to disclose its undersurface of brick and other rubble. The Casino use aggravated many people:

There is no identification on the front of building showing its public nature; that there is only a marquee on which is painted "LUNCHEON," "DINNER," and "COCKTAILS," while the doorman wears a uniform on which appears "AQUATIC PARK CASINO."<sup>17</sup>

Other problems cropped up. The Gordons refused to pay the city rent, arguing that the facilities were incomplete and that the lease specified rent upon completion of the building.<sup>18</sup> The Gordons claimed a loss of \$63.10 per day for the first three months of operation, totalling \$4,352.03 and stated that

the loss is due, to a large extent, to the uncompleted condition of the buildings, grounds, and beach, as well as the fact that dressing rooms and bathing facilities are not yet opened to the general public.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Menu, "Grand Opening Dinner." Collections of the National Maritime Museum, San Francisco.

<sup>15</sup> Fallon Investigation Report, November 14, 1939, page 2.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, page 2.

<sup>17</sup> Fallon Report, page 2.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, page 1.

<sup>19</sup> Letter from Leo Gordon to Captain B.P. Lamb, Secretary, Board of Park Commissioners, April 12, 1939. Exhibit in NARG 69, WPA, Box 902, California, File 651.109, Aquatic Park, page 1.

Summarizing thirteen items of "work to be done," the Gordons noted work that they had performed, such as replacing faulty wiring, adding shelves, and adding vents and hoods for cooking equipment. Things to be done included venetian blinds for windows, the installation of wiring for a neon sign on the front facade, placing clean white sand on the beach, furnish certain rooms, and complete the tile mosaic left undone by the WPA artists.

Public complaints about the Gordon concession, as well as some complaints by various WPA workers about the project and about the lease of the building eventually led to a WPA investigation of the project and of the lease. The findings were none too good.

#### C. Investigation

Various letters written to the WPA complaining about the management and the leasing of the Aquatic Park project finally resulted in a full scale investigation by the WPA's Division of Investigation. Investigators did find several examples of poor planning, misuse of materials and equipment, and improper behavior by the concessionaires. The public building had been turned into a private building for private gain as charged. Examples cited by the investigators included:

a number of school boys sat down at tables on the veranda to eat the lunches which they brought with them. The concessionaire ordered the boys to leave. The stairway from the first floor to this part of the building had been screened off below and was marked "Private-Keep Out."<sup>20</sup>

The third floor, as previously stated, had been planned for use as a public viewing area and had been turned into a private banquet room; "visitors were discouraged from using the upper floors of the building."<sup>21</sup> As summarized, the comments of the investigators found that the building project had been too ambitious for the city to sponsor; maintenance was too costly, as was completing those portions of the project left by the WPA for the city. In addition, the project had been poorly supervised and planned, adding to problems caused by lack of funds and material to cause delays and expensive changes to the structure. Nothing could be done about these problems now, but the investigators did recommend that the Gordon's lease be cancelled and the various concession activities be leased out to several contractors. Plans for the future called for the completion of the tile mosaics, the completion and installation of the Bufano sculpture, the demolition of the old Spring Valley Water Company Pump Station and the construction of a children's playground there, and the completion of the three comfort stations, which were 77 percent complete.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Fallon Report, page 20.

<sup>21</sup> Smith/Mieldazis, page 11.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, pages 13-16.

Reaction to the recommendations was slow. The City was now anxious to remove the Gordons from the building, no doubt due to the lack of money from non-payment of rent as well as the WPA investigation results.

This was pursued despite some changes made by the Gordons, such as withdrawing from some of the areas they had occupied by were not covered by the lease, such as the ladies' lounge and the fourth floor, and the disputed "Private-Keep Out" sign had been taken down. By July of 1940, "the controversy between the City and lessees continues to be the subject of discussion, further complicated by an outside action to force the lessees into bankruptcy." <sup>23</sup>

The San Francisco News of July 15, 1940 editorialized

AQUATIC PARK PROBE-Fit subject for Grand Jury Inquiry is the Aquatic Park mess which has left the city with a million-dollar recreation enterprise absolutely useless.

Announcement that the County Grand Jury has started an investigation is welcome news. Here's hoping no punches will be pulled, no stones left unturned to expose the whole truth of what happened from beginning to end of this miserable story. The public is entitled to the information, no matter what official or other head it hits.

Laudable is the jury's announced purpose of seeking to bring about reopening of the building at the earliest possible time, but there is an imperative duty also upon the investigators to expose the truth.

At no one time since the structure was completed has the public, whose money was used to build it had full and proper use of its facilities. For weeks it has been caught in the meshes of litigation and closed entirely.

Such cavalier handling of an investment of over a million dollars out of the public treasury, city and Federal, is inexcusable, bordering on if not actually plain maladministration.

Let's have the facts!

Some of the questions the Grand Jury wanted answered included "Why did the Park Commission wait 15 months before taking court action to oust the Gordon brothers for failure to pay the specified \$1,000-a-month rental?" and other questions regarding failure to comply with rental agreements, the incomplete nature of the facilities, and the barring of the public from the park.<sup>24</sup> The Grand Jury, however, decided to only "keep an eye" on the Aquatic Park dispute

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<sup>23</sup> Letter of H.E. Smith to B.M. Harloe, July 11, 1940. WPA files NARG 69.

<sup>24</sup> San Francisco News, July 11, 1940.

between the Gordons and the City as the latter sought to oust the former. The Gordons were finally ousted in late 1940; however, to add insult to injury, the waters of the cove were declared unsafe and unsanitary and hence not fit for bathing.

The last chapter in the dispute was in 1942, when the WPA decided to drop any pending investigation of the matter since the "city has taken action necessary to insure public use of the facilities without discrimination" by ousting the Gordons, and the United States Army had taken control of the Aquatic Park facilities "for the duration of the emergency to serve as a headquarters and barracks for the anti-aircraft corps...."<sup>25</sup> This use of the park by the military during the Second World War sealed the use of the park from public use, however, for an additional decade. In the end, the Aquatic Park investigation had accomplished nothing; the Gordons were gone...but Aquatic Park remained a million dollar "white elephant."

The 1940s saw the final battle for a public Aquatic Park being waged on behalf of the citizens of San Francisco. Unfortunately, the victory was Pyrrhic, with limited public access and use due to unsanitary swimming conditions, for a ban on swimming had been imposed by the Board of Park Commissioners until money could be appropriated to repair and update the old system, which was leaking raw sewage into the bay and fouling the waters of Aquatic Park. With the public showers and dressing rooms locked up, and the absence of any presence in the main floors of the bathhouse, the million dollar park was an empty embarrassment to the city. While various offers and plans were being presented for the bathhouse, the Second World War intervened and the park was occupied by the military--namely the men of Battery B, 216th Coast Artillery--for the duration of the war. As a restricted military area, Aquatic Park was once again off-limits to the public and would continue to be until 1946.

#### D. The Military Occupation

Prior to the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, the United States government had been anticipating war with the Axis powers. The military draft had been reinstated in 1940, and by 1941 mobilization was in force. As part of the mobilization plans, the men of Battery B, 216th Coast Artillery, arrived in San Francisco on December 2, 1941 and were quartered in the bathhouse. The Park Commissioners were no doubt relieved; they turned down several offers and plans for Aquatic Park and had only recently, in July of 1941, hauled some eighty million cubic feet of sand from construction excavation for the Union Square Parking Garage for use on the now sandless Aquatic Park beach. With the military plans for the structure, however, the Park Commissioners happily found themselves absolved of "the problem of managing the controversial park building...."<sup>26</sup>

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25 Memorandum to Dudley Frank from Roger J. Bounds, WPA NARG 69 WPA Box 902, California, File 651.109, Aquatic Park, page 1.

26 Toogood, Historic Resource Study, Volume II, page 154.

When the military arrived at Aquatic Park, workmen were busily removing the last traces of equipment and furnishings left over from the Gordon Aquatic Park Casino operation, as well as various maritime artifacts and ship models stored in the building by the city after the 1939 Golden Gate International Exposition on Treasure Island.<sup>27</sup> The men of Battery B had been inducted into service as part of the Minnesota National Guard. After being shipped to California, they had been trained in anti-aircraft defense at Camp Haan, California before being shipped to San Francisco. Upon arrival, the men were quartered in temporary cots around the building; a photograph undoubtedly taken the day of arrival shows wall to wall cots occupied by soldiers in the main lounge, surrounded by Hiler's undersea murals.

After things became more settled, the military set about making the bathhouse a more useful facility for their needs. The enlisted men were quartered in the dressing and shower area; the area above was "officer's country." The motor pool for the Battery was in a vacant lot to the east of the park that would eventually become the Victorian Park. Sentries were posted throughout the park, the motor pool area was fenced off, and Aquatic Park became "off-limits" to the general public. Each morning, at 6 o'clock, the men were roused for reveille and marched up and down Beach Street in front of the batteries throughout the city and life settled down to a headquarters routine.<sup>28</sup>

Apparently the Aquatic Park location appealed to some of the men; one 1st Lieutenant was a member of the Ghirardelli family, and daily could look across the street at the family chocolate factory. When asked "How did you get this assignment?" Ghirardelli "just smiled."<sup>29</sup> Other men fished off of the now closed Municipal Pier, and about fifty "diehards" swam in the cove every morning, despite the health warnings.<sup>30</sup> The 216th soon had company; the building became the headquarters for the entire Fourth anti-Aircraft Command which covered the defense of the Pacific Coast. From the penthouse office placed in the former radio room/Casino cocktail lounge, General John L. Homer commanded between sixty to eighty thousand men during the war.

Under the tenure of General Homer, the building lost much of its hastily thrown together military look. As the headquarters for the Fourth Anti-Aircraft command, the building was organized into a specialized if not opulent military outpost. The penthouse, as the fourth floor was referred to, was the office of General Homer, his aide, and two secretaries. The third floor, the

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<sup>27</sup> Interview with Ken Drewry, San Francisco (former member of the 216th) 1976. Notes by Karl Kortum, San Francisco Maritime Museum.

<sup>28</sup> Drewry Interview.

<sup>29</sup> Interview with Joseph Tallman, San Francisco, October 6, 1977. San Francisco Maritime Museum.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

banquet room, was partitioned into around eleven separate offices with temporary plywood walls. The second floor was turned into a general reception area--the general's driver was stationed in the lobby, and the two circular rooms, the ladies's lounge and the "blue room" restaurant, became messes, served by the kitchen on the second floor. On the ground floor, among the lockers and showers, the enlisted men were quartered--and at one time were apparently fed, for the remains of an army mess were located there in later years, complete with outlets for steam tables, serving lines, and painted on the concrete walls, signs listing the hours for breakfast, lunch, and dinner, and a reminder "If You Can't Make It, Don't Take It" referring to a prohibition on wasting food.<sup>31</sup> Apparently a gas range and a sink were also installed in this area, indicating it may have had a more permanent function than a transitory mess station.

The army also expanded into other areas of the park. The proposed hospital area next to the men' shower area was utilized as a dispensary and medical aid station by the army; in February of 1942 the army proposed to utilize the municipal pier, in July of the same year a proposal was sent to the Board of Park Commissioners requesting the use of the eastern comfort station; both were approved. In addtion, the army also requested and received permission to build a small landing wharf at the west end of the cove near the western comfort station and the terminus of the municipal pier. Permission was granted and the facility was built in December of 1943; the same facility, later remodeled, now serves as the Sea Scout Base in Aquatic Park.<sup>32</sup> Ironically, it is located on the proposed site of a boat house for Sea Scouts planned but never built by the WPA.

The military's concern about a Japanese attack on the Pacific Coast began to abate somewhat after the United States' victory over the Japanese fleet at Midway in June of 1942. Plans were made to phase out the anti-aircraft command at Aquatic Park. Many of the men began to leave; the 216<sup>th</sup> pulled out in February, 1944, enroute to Camp Haan, where they were transferred to other units and other assignments.<sup>33</sup> Other men assigned to Aquatic Park left after VE day.<sup>34</sup> As the war ended, the military began to make plans to transfer Aquatic Park back to the city, its role in protecting the Pacific Coast from foreign attack at an end. Many of the soldiers left in the building after VE and VJ days left in January-February 1946.<sup>35</sup> The facilities, however, could

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<sup>31</sup> Personal Communication, John Martini, Supervisory Park Technician, Aquatic Park, March 14, 1981.

<sup>32</sup> Toogood, Historic Resource Study, Volume II, page 155.

<sup>33</sup> Drewry Interview.

<sup>34</sup> Tallman Interview.

<sup>35</sup> Interview with Colonel Robert Gifford, Chief of Staff, 4<sup>th</sup> Anti-Aircraft Command, San Francisco, 1953. Notes on file in the National Maritime Museum.

not be returned to the city until alterations and damage done to the structures was repaired and restored by the army.

#### E. Wartime Damage

Surprisingly, damage to Aquatic Park done during the military occupation was sparse and the military was quick and responsible about repairs. One of the light fixtures designed by John Glut was broken; the army requested a pattern for a replacement from former WPA supervisor William Mooser. Mooser went through his copies of the plans, found the specifications, and forwarded them to the army, who then had a replica made.<sup>36</sup> Other minor damage such as holes in concrete, marred wood surfaces, and the like were also quickly repaired, and all traces of military use were slowly removed. The plywood partitions on the third floor were taken down, military furniture and phones removed, and the mess hall equipment in the area below the men's bleachers dismantled. A few items were apparently forgotten; a metal guidon for the 216<sup>th</sup> was found a few years ago in storage beneath one of the bleachers; and the painted legends in the old mess hall area were not painted over.

The landing pier at the west end of the cove was also left behind, probably at the request of the city. The park would have been fully returned to the city had an army tug not crashed into Municipal Pier; studies to repair the damage and actual repair work continued through 1947, and the pier was not returned to the city until early 1948.<sup>37</sup> The park was then, once again, completely under the jurisdiction of the City of San Francisco.

One of the sad losses during the war years was not the fault of the military. One of the Bufano sculptures was vandalized. According to Bufano's biography,

Just at the entrance of the park stood Bufano's three-ton penguin. Once a gleaming, stainless-steel and polished porphyry work of art, it was now wrecked by vandals, with its stainless-steel head stolen, its stonework defaced and broken. The Park Commission turned a deaf ear to Benny's years of pleading that the statue be repaired.

In 1949, Bufano took his case to the construction industry, where he found people motivated by strong civic pride. In the dead of the night, these men earned distinction as patrons of the arts by carting the penguin away, thus rescuing it from the low estate into which it had fallen. Park Superintendent Girod was furious. He had the law on his side and public property had been stolen, but he stirred up a hornet's nest when San Francisco was reminded that nothing had been done to restore Aquatic Park! The superintendent

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36 Mooser Interview.

37 Toogood, Historic Resource Study, Volume II, page 158.

cooled down when money, materials, labor and work space were provided by individuals so that Bufano could restore his creation to its former glory. There was nothing the Park Commission could do but give its sanction.

Bufano restored this beautiful sculpture, sometimes called The Prayer since the head of the huge penguin lifts itself to Heaven as though in prayer. The wings gently and lovingly enfold two baby penguins at its feet.<sup>38</sup>

As for the other Bufano statues, many had been hauled away by the city for storage during the war years. When Bufano looked for the work in 1946

He found them stored,--or rather, dumped--in the city yard behind the Laguna Honda Hospital. It was a disillusioned, almost tearful Bufano who viewed the debris, for his precious life's works were lying there broken and defaced. Nine of his pieces were smashed, decapitated or mutilated.<sup>39</sup>

After public protest, the city agreed to find out who had been responsible for allowing the art to be damaged, to safeguard it for the future, and to ask Bufano to restore or direct the restoration of the broken art work. The various pieces that the city retained were eventually placed in public areas; a red granite seal simiar to one still in the bathhouse was placed at the Hillsdale Shopping Center; a small black stone mouse and a rabbit, similar to a stylized toad still at Aquatic Park, were placed in the Valencia Courts Housing Project in San Francisco.<sup>40</sup> The repaired Prayer now stands in a protected enclave in San Francisco's Maritime Plaza.

The war years at Aquatic Park did see some positive changes. The shifting sand, caused by a strong northwesterly current, kept pushing the sand off the beach and piling it at the east end of the cove. In 1944, the problem was so bad that the sea wall, undermined, threatened to collapse. Additional sand was brought in and wooden groins were placed in the sand to prevent future erosion. The problem of unsanitary water was also tackled; in March of 1946 a fifty foot square lot of land was granted to the Department of Public Works to build a sewage pumping plant at the corner of Jefferson and Hyde Streets; a \$70,000 appropriation was allotted in 1947, thereby helping alleviate the sewage problem that had been plaguing the cove.

One other good result of the wartime occupation was that many of the soldiers stationed there "fell in love with San Francisco" and returned after the war or stayed to become members of the community. Some of these men were the

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38 Wilkining and Brown, Bufano: An Intimate Biography, pages 159-160.

39 Ibid, page 158.

40 Ibid, pages 223 and 229.

sources of information for this chapter. The war years provided a respite for the city of San Francisco's problems with Aquatic Park, which, a full decade after its dedication, was still a "white elephant."

With the transfer of the facilities back to the city in 1948, the problems would start anew and a successful solution would not be found until 1951, when the San Francisco Maritime Museum located in the building. At last, the building had a purpose and a means, hopefully, of paying for itself.

## 8. POST-WAR YEARS, 1948-1978

The years following the return of Aquatic Park to the city after its temporary use as a military facility and prior to the use of the bathhouse as the San Francisco Maritime Museum have been described as a "slump."<sup>1</sup> The neglect of the park by the Board of Park Commissioners, and their seeming inability to find an appropriate and financially self-supporting use for the buildings, when coupled with the ban on swimming imposed due to raw sewage being dumped into the cove, added to the public's attitude of Aquatic Park being a useless endeavor.

### A. Inaction

Following the return of Aquatic Park by the military, the situation remained much as it had prior to the war; the buildings were locked, swimming was forbidden, and the promise of Aquatic Park as a public facility seemed forgotten. The Park Commission's budget request for Aquatic Park in 1948-1949 had been cut by the City; the only sums allotted were for a watchman and a small custodial operation. The Park Commission, forced to dig deep into its internal financial resources, did find the funding for a temporary solution:

the four point policy opened the building to the public on a five-day week schedule; made the lower floor available for sunbathers who could use the dressing room facilities; set aside the Blue Room for an adult recreation program under the American Women's Voluntary Service; and made the other rooms available for social gatherings, meetings, and the like, on a scheduled basis.<sup>2</sup>

The use of the lower decks for sunbathing was a boon to the legions who had previously been advised to use the new sand beach; the use of the building's decks for their originally intended purpose was a step in the right direction. Swimming was still forbidden, an action that persisted well into 1952 despite the construction of a new sewer system that apparently alleviated the health department's concern about the unsanitary conditions of the cove; public protest eventually forced the issue into the open and swimming was allowed in July 1953, with the showers and locker rooms finally being utilized, like the sun decks, for their intended purpose.

The unsanitary conditions for swimming had sparked a city action in March of 1952 for the construction of an enclosed fresh water swimming pool at Aquatic Park at the site of the now demolished Spring Valley Water Company pumping station. An application was sent to the National Production Authority in Washington for the construction of four enclosed pools throughout the city; the plan was enthusiastically endorsed by School Board and other community agencies. Voters had endorsed the plans in a 1948 school bond election. The

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<sup>1</sup> Toogood, Historic Resource Study, Volume II, page 158.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, page 159.

NPA, however, turned down the plans. The Aquatic Park pool, which would have been an Olympic competition sized, 165 by 75 concrete pool with a flat roofed glass and steel structure covering it, was never built.<sup>3</sup>

Other activities permitted in the area after the war included the use of the former military pier and structure at the west end of the cove and the use of the site of the pumping station (the proposed site of the enclosed swimming pool) for a bocce ball courts.

In 1950, a proposal was advanced to make Aquatic Park the central focus of the San Francisco Maritime Museum. Under the plans of the proposal, the bathhouse would become the museum building. This idea was approved by the Board of Park Commissioners and Aquatic Park was inaugurated into a new service as a museum. It would prove to be the most successful use of the facilities since their construction.

#### B. The San Francisco Maritime Museum

The idea of using the bathhouse, with its unique ship-like contours and marine motif, as a maritime museum was not a new concept. Prior to the occupation of the premises during the war, a small marine exhibit had been housed there. The war then intervened, and the exhibit of marine paintings and models was removed. It was during the early years of the war that Karl Kortum, son of a Petaluma chicken rancher and an enthusiastic student of sailing vessels and their lore, visited the closed park and was struck with the idea of it being center stage for a large maritime museum. Unfortunately, the sea called to Kortum first, but after his return from the last voyage of the Kaiulani, one of the last square-riggers on the Pacific Coast.

Upon his return, Kortum turned his energies to adapting Aquatic Park to his purpose. The history of the establishment of the San Francisco Maritime Museum is told in the appended narrative at the end of this report. However, it should be noted that the Maritime Museum, which was established and opened in May of 1951 after much hard work on the part of Kortum and his colleagues, David Nelson and Scott Newhall, and many volunteers. From the beginning the museum was a success, drawing 300,000 visitors in its first year of operation. The first displays were ship models and paintings, as well as small maritime artifacts. Some of the displays had been part of the previous marine exhibit of pre-war years. Kortum, however, wanted more than a standard maritime museum. Borrowing a concept from European museums, Kortum brought in parts of actual sailing vessels, creating an innovative and exciting display technique. According to Kortum:

The exhibit philosophy was influenced by the display methods of the Swedish Maritime Museum in Stockholm; the curators have emphasized massiveness and authenticity in displays, such as the fifteen-foot high bows of the schooner COMMERCE, a huge anchor from the ship of

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<sup>3</sup> San Francisco News, March 12, 1952.

the line INDEPENDENCE, and the log windlass from the Alaska Packers vessel STAR OF FRANCE.<sup>4</sup>

This innovative technique was probably one of the main reasons for the success of the museum.

In addition to displaying parts of ships, Kortum and his associates also wanted to display whole ships...in the cove behind the bathhouse. He was largely successful, and his story as told by himself is also appended to this report. By the early 1970s, the Maritime Museum, recognized as one of the largest and the best in the world, was the center stage for a fleet of historic ships operated by the museum association and the Department of Parks for the State of California. The vessels moored in the lagoon under the administration of the State Parks included the schooner C.A. Thayer, the scow schooner Alma, the ferryboat Eureka, the steam schooner Wapama, and the steam tug Hercules. Down the waterfront, at Pier 43, the square rigger Balclutha was moored and open to the public; next to her, but not open, was the English built steam tug Eppleton Hall, managed by the Maritime Museum Association.

The original concept Kortum proposed for Aquatic Park proved successful and preserved the public use of the "white elephant." Unfortunately, this use also involved adverse alteration and destruction of some of the bathhouse's historic fabric.

#### C. Maritime Museum Alterations

The original displays of the maritime museum were simple glass cases and paintings which could be arranged around the various WPA artworks and ornate fixtures of the bathhouse. However, the building was not designed to function as a working museum, and many sacrifices had to be made for the building to serve as an adequate museum facility. On the main facade of the building, a huge model of a ship's stern, with the name "Maritime Museum" was hung, being the only major external alteration to the building's appearance. The painted legend "San Francisco Maritime Museum" was added to the east end of the building to further advertise its museum use.

Interior alterations were at first few. To attach paintings, artifacts, and models, holes were drilled in walls for support. Unfortunately, several of these holes were drilled into the undersea life murals on the second floor. These holes, along with water damage and scars from scrapes, are the most adverse and visible effect on these important artworks. The changes made to the second floor, however, are limited in scope when compared to those on the third floor. There, the entire eastern half of the floor has been radically modified to better suit museum needs.

Utilizing hollow drywalls and built-in display cases, the addition is a handsome example of museum construction. Unfortunately, it damaged and covered

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<sup>4</sup> Letter, Karl Kortum to Miss Jennifer Payne, September 22, 1980, page 1.

many of the murals and designs on the walls, including multi-colored walls and plywood and metal three dimensional design elements. The terrazo floor, with its intricate designs, was covered with a carpet. The renovation is relatively recent, being started in the winter of 1976:

On March 22 work started on the creation of two second floor bays in the first step of a complete renovation of the Museum's Gold Rush and Cape Horner exhibit....Designed by Director Karl Kortum, the new display will employ photographs, paintings and models to tell the story of the first and second wave of sailing ships that dominated the bay scene in the last century.<sup>5</sup>

In keeping with the museum's practice of utilizing actual ship parts in displays, the new exhibit bays would feature

the recently discovered stem timbers of a ship found at the site of Long Wharf during excavation for Embarcadero Center. In the Cape Horner bay the same sense of the past will be achieved by the figurehead of the downeaster Centennial, built 100 years ago, the steering gear of the ship Blairstmore, and part of the hull plating of the four masted bark Somali. Opening of the new galleries is tentatively planned for July, at which time a dedication ceremony will be held.<sup>6</sup>

Money for additional bays across the third floor never materialized, and the two bays completed in 1976 were the only major alteration of that floor.

Additional alterations made by the Maritime Museum include the replacement of the original stairway bannisters, which were brass ended rope, with chromed metal railings for safety reasons, the removal of the facilities in two restrooms on the third floor and their conversion into office space, the renovation of the glass wall pantry into a library, with internal wooden walls and shelving being added, the addition of a nameboard to the facade below the modeled ship's stern on the front of the building, and the removal of the "yardarm" attachment on the flagpole atop the fourth floor roof and the addition of four perimeter flagpoles on the same roof.<sup>7</sup>

While some of the alterations constitute an adverse effect to the artworks and architecture of what the staff affectionately referred to as their "Flash Gordon Bathtub," many are not irreversible and have served an important function in one of the most successful and popular maritime museums in the

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<sup>5</sup> Sea Letter of the San Francisco Maritime Museum, Winter/Spring 1976, page 9.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Personal Communication with John Martini, Supervisory Park Technician, Aquatic Park, June 1, 1981.

country. Current plans of the National Park Service call for the removal of the museum to a new custom-built facility; the alterations to the bathhouse at Aquatic Park could then be removed and the structure and the artworks restored.

#### D. Changes to Aquatic Park, 1948-1978

Aquatic Park, much like the bathhouse, has changed...but not much. The removal of all statuary from the park was one major change; as stated earlier, only two examples remain and are on exhibit in the bathhouse. The nature of change at Aquatic Park has been slow and many changes or alterations are not readily visible, and Aquatic Park appears, at first glance, to be much as it was on Dedication Day in 1939.

The Municipal Pier, after being damaged by the Army tug in 1947, was reopened to the public and became a popular fishing locale. Unfortunately, the Comfort Station at the end of the pier, which was less than fifty percent complete when the WPA turned the project over to the city, was never finished. Only the rough concrete exterior of the building was constructed, and this was eventually sealed; the only access is by bolted hatches on the roof. Inside, the rooms are filled with rubble and water. The pier itself was damaged seriously when it was rammed in a heavy fog by the freighter Harry Luckenbach on February 3, 1953. According to the press accounts, the ship, feeling its way through the thick fog at about 10:40 a.m., was proceeding at about 10 miles per hour when the pier loomed ahead, the ship hit the curve of the pier at the outer perimeter, cutting "a 12-foot, V-shaped swath in the pier's reinforced concrete...It scattered a dozen fishermen and Aquatic Park work-men who had been on the pier....<sup>8</sup> The ship escaped with minor damage, with the pier receiving the worse damage. The estimated cost of repairs was over \$10,000.

Comfort Station Number 2, unlike its counterpart at the end of the pier, was completed and opened to the public in 1944. It still continues in operation under the same management today, with its interior fittings little changed from the first day of business. A new counter, a new awning, and a new deep dryer are some of the few additions to the building. The proposed life-guard station on the roof, however, was never equipped and like the stations on the roofs of the other two comfort stations, are open enclosures prohibited to public access.

The problems of the constantly moving sand beach were temporarily solved with wooden breakwaters installed in 1941; in later years a stone breakwater was created in the lagoon and concrete baffles were installed between the pilings of the pier to keep the strong winter surge from removing the sand to the east end of the park and exposing the broken rubble that lies underneath.

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<sup>8</sup> San Francisco Chronicle, February 4, 1953, page 1.

During the years of City operation contiguous with the Maritime Museum operation, the beach was open to public swimming and use. A small concession stand was added to the east end of the building after the Grand Concession was converted into part of the facilities utilized by the San Francisco Senior Center. Senior Center alterations to the portions of the bathhouse they occupy will be covered in the next section.

#### E. The San Francisco Senior Center

In addition to the San Francisco Maritime Museum, the bathhouse at Aquatic Park also became the home of another community organization, the San Francisco Senior Center. Under the auspices of the senior center, many of the lower portions of the building at the former restaurant at the east end, the "blue room" have been converted or altered to their purposes. The San Francisco Senior Center, which is the oldest, private, non-profit senior center in the United States, was established in 1947 when

Mr. Charles Rose, who lived in a small downtown hotel strolled to Union Square every day for a bit of sunshine and friendship. He met the same group of men daily. All retired from work and nothing to do. Union Square was fine in good weather, but where to meet when the rains came. They just had to find another meeting place. In April 1947 a newspaper article told of the efforts of one man trying to interest the public in doing something for the retired worker. Mr. Rose and his friends began calling on the mayor and supervisors always asking the same question: "When would the City do something for the older people?" In the same year four members of the Women's Auxiliary Service rented Native Sons Hall for Sunday programs. Hundreds of retired people attended these musicals. It soon became apparent that there was a dire need for larger quarters.

Mr. Rose learned that the Department of Park and Recreation had a vacant building at the foot of Polk Street. This building was a W.P.A. project....After many more meetings, because other groups also wanted to use the building, City Hall decided that this would be the Recreation Center for the retired person and it was opened late in 1947.<sup>9</sup>

In 1951, the Senior Recreation Center, planning to enlarge and modernize their facilities, chose the name San Francisco Senior Center and began to look for money and assistance. "A member of the Board of Directors enlisted the help of her architect husband. He visualized how to use the vacant space. He could see classrooms, workshops, lounge, library, etc."<sup>10</sup> Raising funds for the renovation, and also for the installation of an elevator from the first to

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<sup>9</sup> Anonymous, "History of the San Francisco Senior Center," Typescript, 1975, page 1.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

second floors was done, with \$23,500 alone being raised for the elevator, which was designed by retired Architect George Applegarth, who had previously worked on the design of various public buildings such as the Palace of the Legion of Honor in Lincoln Park. The elevator was installed in the east end of the open portico on the rear of the bathhouse. Carefully designed to imitate and use the original design elements, it blends into the background and is indistinguishable from the original fabric and construction.

Additional work consisted of the remodeling of the Blue Room, the former restaurant and first "maritime museum, into the "Bayview Room," a community recreation hall and kitchen for low-cost senior meals. Alterations to the original fabric consisted of the removal of painted wooden plaques placed on the wall to represent the flags of various yachting clubs, the repainting of the room, with its varied shades of blue (hence the name) to white, and the removal of the original door to the sidewalk and the installation of a new door that provided wheelchair access.

On the first floor, many of the former offices and portions of the shower and dressing areas were converted into offices and classrooms. Plywood drywalls separate the men's and women's showers from classrooms, and the Grand Concession was changed into a multi-purpose lounge and library with the assistance of the Junior League of San Francisco.<sup>11</sup> The main alteration to the Grand Concession was the demolition of the former concession stand, which occupied the center of the room. The four pillars that served as the corners of the concession counter still stand, their jagged edges now sheathed in panelling.

The Senior Center still occupies the building and continues its thirty-four year tradition of service to the elderly and retired of San Francisco, helping to "break the cycle of isolation, loneliness, despair, malnutrition and ill health for increasing members of San Francisco's large elderly population ...."<sup>12</sup>

#### F. Bocce Ball Courts

The site of the Bensley Water Pumping Station, later the Spring Valley Water Company Pumping Station, at the west end of Aquatic Park had become, after the demolition of the structure in the late 1940s, a largely undeveloped court for the popular Italian sport of Bocce Ball, a form of bowling without pins. The courts, as they were, became a popular gathering spot for the local Bocce Ball players and countless retired men who would sit on the sidelines and offer pointers to the players. The area had been earmarked for a Children's Play-ground as part of the original WPA proposal, but like other components of the park, was never funded and hence never built. The property, which was owned

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<sup>11</sup> Anonymous, "the San Francisco Senior Center" September 18, 1980. Typescript.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

by the City, was traded to the Eastman Kodak Company in the early 1950s for a warehouse location after the City decided that the site Eastman Kodak had selected for a warehouse on Rincon Hill was suitable for a public bridge. Despite the protests of the San Francisco Maritime Museum Association, the Aquatic Park Bocce Association, and other local groups, the land was transferred to Eastman Kodak and the area was graded and developed into the present yellow brick faced structure.<sup>13</sup> As a gesture to the local interests, Eastman Kodak did allot some land for a much reduced Bocce Ball court. In November of 1958, plans for a new court were advanced to the Park and Recreation Commission, the successors to the Board of Park Commissioners. The plans were commended and passed on the City's General Manager for part of a budget request for 1959-1960. The design, prepared by George Quesada, A.I.A., of San Francisco, was funded; Quesada received \$1,950.00 for his plans and specifications; and \$15,304.00 was granted for the construction of the gravel courts with their redwood and fiberglass roof. Additional work was done in 1960-1961, in part with a \$1,000 grant from Eastman Kodak.<sup>14</sup> The completed facilities stand today and are still in use though in somewhat sad repair. The redwood and fiberglass cover for the courts is leaking and cracking, and the hard-packed gravel courts have been worn and damaged by dripping water and two decades of hard use.

#### G. Victorian Park

The last area of Aquatic Park to be developed was Victorian Park at the east end of the park property. The site of the early bathhouses of the 1860s-1880s, the site had been filled in with earthquake debris and other rubble, and by 1936 had become the construction yard and headquarters for the WPA project. In 1942, it had been fenced in and used as the motor pool for the military, but after the war had reverted to a weed choked lot occasionally used to park cars. The original proposal for the San Francisco Maritime Museum had included an extension of the Hyde Street Cable Car line to the lot, with appropriate facilities and a landscaped park at the terminus as part of a waterfront revival envisioned by Karl Kortum and others.

These plans set on a shelf until 1955, when the cable car was extended to the lot. The museum, working with the State Department of Beaches of Parks, which was then setting up the San Francisco Maritime State Historic Park on the Hyde Street pier, approved the landscaping and development. After much wrangling between the Maritime Museum over a proper design, the finished park plans as of 1960 reflected much of the Maritime Museum staff's way of thinking. Cobblestone walks, gravel paths, Victorian style bollards, and other features were designed by the museum staff and installed to create the atmosphere of a modern interpretation of a "Victorian Park." The work was reviewed and re-drafted in part by landscape architect George Church as a donation, and

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<sup>13</sup> Conversation with Karl Kortum, June 8, 1981.

<sup>14</sup> Minutes of the San Francisco Park and Recreation Department, November 13, 1958; August 13, 1959; August 11, 1960; and October 13, 1960.

several features, such as the 1870s east iron fountain for "dogs, horses, and humans" at the Jefferson Street side of the park were also donated. The completed design of the park in a sense completed the WPA plans for this area, which had called for open lawn spaces and curving paths. The WPA never envisioned, however, the pseudo-Victorian embellishments of the Maritime Museum to create "An Eclectic Park Lit by Gaslight."<sup>15</sup>

#### H. Problems

The final development of the area surrounding Aquatic Park and the San Francisco Maritime Museum created an atmosphere of Victorian ambience with a touristy air. The mooring of the historic ships in Aquatic Park lagoon, the presence of the old rowing club buildings at the foot of Jefferson and Hyde, and the crowds of thousands of vacationing tourists made the Aquatic Park the gateway to the shopping and restaurant complex at Fisherman's Wharf. Gone were the days of a semi-industrial atmosphere and the dilapidated appearance of the area. Problems, however, sprang up.

Under City management, Aquatic Park slowly degenerated. Trash pickups allegedly were infrequent, transients slept in the park, and the on-again, off-again swimming ban was in effect between 1960 and 1970, and infrequently throughout the 1970s. In the bathhouse, problems began to develop as the facility began to deteriorate. The exterior, unpainted since the early 1950s, began slowly to turn a light grey, and water leaks in the windows began to peel the murals in the main lounge. Water leaks elsewhere in the building caused problems as well, particularly in the area below the men's bleachers, where the Maritime Museum had converted the Boy's Showers and Dressing Rooms into a storage facility. Reflecting the overall sad state of the park, the storage area was described by the San Francisco Chronicle in 1970 as a "sad dump." According to the Chronicle, a tour of the facilities after a rain storm found "considerable water damage among reams of magazines and historical maritime records and in the rusting iron components of old ships that included gears, engine parts, winches and assorted pieces of equipment."

In addition to the poor condition of the roof, with its cracked and leaky skylights originally intended to provide natural light for the dressing rooms, the area was overcrowded with the museum's large collections:

Throughout the rooms are wooden shelves stacked with every conceivable object--even oil paintings. The place has a surrealistic quality, resembling more the scene of a hurricane's path than storage areas where things can be classified according to museum standard.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> "An Eclectic Park Lit by Gaslight," notebook kept by the San Francisco Maritime Museum, n.d., circa 1961.

<sup>16</sup> San Francisco Chronicle, February 15, 1970.

Such was the situation when the complex was transferred to the National Park Service as part of the new Golden Gate National Recreation Area. The Maritime Museum remained a separate entity until June of 1978, when it too became part of the National Park Service and was joined with the historic ships of the State Historic Park to become the National Maritime Museum at San Francisco.

## EPILOG: THE GOLDEN GATE NATIONAL RECREATION AREA, 1978-1981

On January 3, 1978, Aquatic Park was transferred to the Golden Gate National Recreation Area, becoming a unit of one of the country's major urban national parks. Park Technician John Martini, formerly assigned to the Historic Ships Unit at Hyde Street Pier, was designated Supervisory Park Technician, Aquatic Park, and officially started his duties in April 1978 with a staff of "zero."<sup>1</sup> Aquatic Park had suffered from neglect through the years, and the National Park Service inherited many problems both with the facilities and with the use of the area. Since 1978, work slowly progressed to remedy the situation and restore and renovate the facilities and the character of Aquatic Park.

The character of the park had deteriorated; arriving National Park Service staff were told of "muggings, car clouts...vandalism...women had even been raped in the ladies' locker room." In addition, the "facility was dirty and worn out. Nothing had been painted for years, windows were broken, plumbing was bad, and the beach was eroded and filthy."<sup>2</sup> Initial Park Service action taken to upgrade the facilities consisted of installing trashcans throughout the park, cleaning the beach, repainting the locker rooms (and eventually repainting the entire exterior of the bathhouse), repairing broken windows, replanting and watering weed infested flower beds, installing two temporary plywood lifeguard towers and new lockers, and the repair of some exterior lights on the seawall.

In addition to these repairs, several changes were made to the structure to better serve as a National Park Service facility. City installed parking meters in the park were removed, and bars were installed outside the windows of the former medical facility in the bleacher area, allowing the installation of a permanent lifeguard office with showers, rescue equipment, a scuba dive equipment locker, and an emergency first aid station. One major alteration was the installation of a new door to the men's shower area. Under City operation, the shower area had been accessible only through a long

...underground passage...filled with old rusty lockers, broken windows, and peeling paint. This was corrected in September (1978) when a new door was cut into the area, leading directly to the beach, and a wall built to separate the locker shower area from the rest of the huge complex;<sup>3</sup> the new area was then turned over to the Senior Citizen's Center.

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<sup>1</sup> John Martini, "Year End Report--Aquatic Park, 1978. Typescript Manuscript, Golden Gate National Recreation Area, page 1.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, page 2.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, page 4.

In June 1978, the San Francisco Maritime Museum was transferred to the Golden Gate National Recreation Area. An entrance fee had been charged to the museum in the past and was slated to be continued under National Park Service management; a new policy banning fee collections, however, changed these plans and the museum was opened free on July 17, 1978 for the first time. The result was that 1,111 people visited the museum the first day of free admission, as compared to 300 visitors the day before; after that, visitation levels were up 200 to 300 percent.<sup>4</sup> At the end of 1978, visitation figures for the six months of National Park Service operation were 115,290 visitors, helping make the Golden Gate National Recreation Area the most heavily visited and popular National Park Service unit in the country.

Some problems inherited with the facilities have not been rectified as of this writing. Severe settlement of the Beach Street portion of the bathhouse has caused the cracking and sinking of a major portion of the terrazo sidewalk outside the main entrance. Cracking and settling is also evident on the second floor terrazo in the main lounge. Settling of the facade of the building has also caused the windows to leak, and as a result the murals in the main lounge to peel away from the wall and suffer serious water damage. The settling problem has also contributed to problems with the roof of the bathhouse. Originally a tiled surface used for sunbathing, the tiles, with the settling, apparently cracked and were then covered by the City with a red asphaltum covering which has cracked and lifted, trapping water that eventually seeps through into the building.

The problems with the sinking sidewalk, the leaky roof, and the damaged murals continue as of this writing, but steps are being taken to rectify the problems and repair Aquatic Park's aging facilities for many additional years of public service. The potential of the popular park today has certainly proved its final worth; no longer a "white elephant," Aquatic Park is a heavily used area for swimming and other aquatic sports and as the gateway to the Fisherman's Wharf tourist complex, the facilities, with ever increasing demands, appear to be living up to the staff's aspirations of being "one of the best all around units of GGNRA...."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Martini, page 7.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, page 12.

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